CONTEMPORARY BRITISH FICTION AND THE MARKETING OF MIXED RACE

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that contemporary mixed-race authors, such as Zadie Smith, are central cultural figures through which narratives of British mixed race have been constructed and circulated post-2000. This thesis argues that the discourses of race constructed and disseminated to the wider British public by external agents, such as journalists, publishers, reveal the persistence of limiting narratives of mixed race in Britain today. Taking a case study approach, this thesis analyses ideas of mixedness that are established through the media coverage surrounding their work, alongside the modes of mixedness made available through their work, arguing that their texts provide a crucial intervention into narratives of mixed race, and race more broadly, in contemporary Britain.

Alongside this analysis of external representations of mixedness, this thesis also examines the representation of mixed-race identity made available through the work of the authors themselves, arguing that these insider-led explorations of mixedness speak to, and against, mainstream narratives of mixedness and offer new representations and interpretations of mixedness. This thesis takes within its scope the ways in which ideas about mixed race have peaked throughout the twenty-first century, from the release of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* in 2000 through to the present day. The authors I focus on are Zadie Smith (*White Teeth*, 2000, *Swing Time*, 2016 and *Feel Free*, 2018), Hari Kunzru (*The Impressionist*, 2002 and *White Tears*, 2017), Monica Ali (*Brick Lane*, 2003) and Diana Evans (*26a*, 2005 and *Ordinary People*, 2018).

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INTRODUCTION

In November 2018, the stage adaptation of Zadie Smith's seminal 2000 novel *White Teeth* opened at the Kiln Theatre in London. Adapted by playwright Stephen Sharkey, the play opens twenty-five years after Smith's novel closes on the eve of 1993, introducing the audience to Irie Jones' grown up, dentist daughter Rosie Jones. The play is structured in a series of flashbacks that reveal to Rosie the story of her mother and her two potential fathers, following the characters, and the local area of Kilburn, through the last three decades of the twentieth century, bringing it up to the contemporary moment through the additional storyline of Irie's adult daughter Rosie. Unlike the novel which follows the different generations of the Iqbal and Jones families, the play's primary focus is on the narrative of mixed-race character Irie Jones and her multi hyphenate, white British-Jamaican-Bangladeshi daughter Rosie Jones. The play includes musical numbers and a polyphony of accents, creating a sense of a vibrant and celebratory atmosphere of cultural diversity: the inclusion of stereotypical Indian and Jamaican accents seeming to reflect 'a desire to represent a happy multicultural society with inclusive laughter as its aim'.[1]

Whilst this atmosphere of celebratory diversity makes sense in the context of Smith's work and reception in 2000, though problematic even then, it reverberates uncomfortably in 2018's increasingly fractured, right wing, post-Brexit vote British landscape. This contradiction is deliberately invoked in the stage play by the decision to bring the novel into the contemporary moment through the inclusion of Irie's adult daughter, knowingly re-invoking those early noughties discourses of multiculturalism in the here and now. Reviews of the play, however, have not been as celebratory and echo my own uncomfortable feelings

[1] Sarah Ilott, *New Postcolonial British Genres: Shifting the Boundaries* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.172.

about the production. *The New York Times* review, whilst praising Sharkey's attempt at a 'corrective' inclusionism in the face of an increasingly divided nation, called the play 'inchoate and piecemeal'[2] and the review in *The Guardian* proclaims the tone of the play one of 'desperate conviviality', at odds with the increasingly hostile social landscape of the UK.[3]

The stage adaptation of *White Teeth* provides a useful synthesis of some of the key ideas, questions and interests of this thesis. What is the significance of the mixed-race figure to discourses of British multiculturalism? How does fiction centred on mixed-race protagonists contribute to discourses of mixed race? How important are mixed-race authors, such as Zadie Smith, to social understanding and attitudes towards mixedness? The continued reliance on Smith within British culture to disseminate and articulate ideas about race in Britain, despite her long-term residence in the US, identifies her work as an important conduit for thinking about discourses of mixed race. In acknowledgement of this, this thesis is bookended by a consideration of Smith's work and cultural prominence, from the publication of *White Teeth* in 2000 to the publication of *Swing Time* (2016) and *Feel Free* (2018).

The play's re-invocation of the discourses of mixed race and multiculturalism that defined the original publication of the novel, illustrate that the mixed-race figure remains a significant medium through which ideas about the nation, mixedness, multiculturalism and race relations are communicated. The decision to adapt the novel, and the ability to secure funding for its stage adaptation in 2018, reflects the continued importance of mixed-race authors to the articulation of mixed race, as well as to wider narratives about multiculturalism

[2] Matt Wolf, ''White Teeth' Makes a Big-Hearted, but Bumpy, Transition to the Stage', *The New York Times*, 9 November 2018 < https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/09/theater/white-teeth-london-play-kiln.html> [accessed 2 January 2019].
[3] Susannah Clapp, 'The week in theatre: White Teeth; Dealing with Clair – review', *The Guardian,* 11 November 2018 < https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/nov/11/white-teeth-kiln-review-zadie-smith-dealing-with-clair-orange-tree-martin-crimp> [accessed 2 January 2019].

and diversity in Britain. As this thesis will argue, Smith's debut novel instigated a trend for mixed-race fiction – both in relation to the racial identity of the protagonists and their authors – and marked an epochal moment in which the figure of the mixed-race author became a vehicle for the task of renegotiating Britishness and presenting a vision of a multicultural, tolerant nation. This thesis argues that this narrative of multiculturalism is entwined with discourses of mixed race in a process aligned with what Omi and Winant describe as a 'racial project', a 'sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed', in accordance with the socio-political requirements of the governing order.[4] Building upon Omi and Winant's notion of the racial project, this thesis examines the ways in which mixed-race authors, and the image of the mixed-race figure, have become embroiled in the socio-political discourses of the twenty-first century. The aim of this thesis is to examine the ways in which representations of mixed race are put to socio-political use and the ways in which the authors implicated within this mixed-race racial project resist this positioning and 'transform' ideas about mixed race, national identity and multiculturalism. In doing so, this thesis represents the first in-depth examination of dialogues of mixed race in contemporary British fiction and the ways in which the figure of the mixed-race author functions more widely in publishing and media discourse.

In their study of the representation of mixed race in the twentieth century, Caballero and Aspinall argue that cultural interest in mixed race 'ebbs and flows', taking on different meanings and significance in different time periods and socio-political contexts.[5] Identifying the publication of *White Teeth* as an epochal moment, this thesis argues that social interest in mixed race was rising at the turn of the twenty-first century, emblematised by the popularity

[4] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p.55.
[5] Chamion Caballero and Peter J. Aspinall, *Mixed Race Britain in The Twentieth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p.482.

and hype surrounding the publication of Smith's novel. Whilst the novel itself garnered critical and popular acclaim, its author, and her racial background, received similar levels of attention. The same fascination with racial mixing that Caballero and Aspinall argue has long preoccupied the British media and public, reignited at the start of the millennium, coalescing around the publication of *White Teeth*. Corinne Fowler has referred to *White Teeth* as epitomising a marketing strategy where the novel functions 'as a brand' in itself, 'a purveyor of taste and a means of constructing identity'.[6] In this sense, Smith's overwhelming popular and critical success proved a successful model, instigating a trend within the publishing industry for fiction about mixed race and British multiculturalism. Smith's success also indicated the broad potential market for writers of mixed race, which paved the way for authors such as Hari Kunzru, Monica Ali and Diana Evans – also addressed within this thesis - whilst simultaneously reflecting the problematically narrow model of success for non-white authors during this period, as Fowler's analysis of *White Teeth* and Joe Pemberton's *Forever and Ever Amen* illustrates. Invoking Zadie Smith became a marketing tool in itself that came to 'characterise the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society'.[7] Zadie Smith's name functioned as a watchword for a sense of celebratory, exceptional and exotic multiculturalism that was inextricable from ideas about mixed race and proved immensely marketable within this period.

This thesis examines some of the mixed-race authors that followed in Smith's immediate wake, each introduced to the literary marketplace with the title of the 'new Zadie Smith',[8] to explore the ways in which their racial identities were incorporated into the

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[6] Corinne Fowler, 'A Tale of Two Novels: Developing a Devolved Approach to Black British Writing', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 43:3 (2008), 75 – 94 (p.80).
[7] Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', *Modernity and Its Discontents*, (1969), 299 – 314 (p.304).
[8] Harriet Lane, 'Ali's in wonderland', *The Observer*, 1 June 2003 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/jun/01/fiction.features1> [accessed 2 January 2019].

marketing of their novels and examine what sense of mixed-race social identity was disseminated through the promotional materials surrounding their work.[9] In stories that mirrored Smith's own – British mixed-race authors who are often prestigiously educated, were awarded huge advances for their debut novels and garnered *Granta* nominations and plenty of pre-publicity hype – Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist* was published in 2002, accompanied by reports of a seven-figure advance and a *Granta* Best of British accolade. The hype surrounding Monica Ali's 2003 *Brick Lane* debut was also heightened by a *Granta* accolade – bestowed pre-publication and reportedly on the basis of 80 pages of the novel – and the ensuing protests about the authenticity of the cultural representation of the novel. By the time Diana Evans' debut *26a* was published in 2005, publicity for the novel commented on the increasingly worn-out title of the 'new Zadie Smith' and, as I identify in chapter four, the more muted popular reception of the novel signalled the waning interest in mixed-race fiction, and authors, that coalesced with declining attitudes towards multiculturalism. James Procter has argued that the success of Zadie Smith, Monica Ali and Andrea Levy demonstrates that 'mainstream popularity [was] undeniably bound up with issues of race and

[9] Though this thesis broadly adopts the term marketing materials to refer to the media coverage and paratextual apparatus of the texts – interviews, reviews, profiles, book covers – I recognise that there are other crucial elements of the literary marketing process that there is not space to consider within the scope of this study, yet which vitally inform the reception and perception of contemporary authors, such as literary festivals, book groups, literary prize culture, state-sponsored literary programmes and the recent increase in diversity initiatives within the publishing industry. Whilst there is not space within this study to adequately consider the ways in which these marketing processes affect and inform the positioning of these authors within the literary marketplace, I recognise that further analysis into these mechanisms of the publishing industry is needed. It is also important to note at this juncture, that reference is made in chapters of this thesis to archive press materials, accessed via the Penguin Random House archives, in reference to Monica Ali and Diana Evans. Due to restrictive permissions on behalf of the publishing house, I was only permitted to quote from publicly accessible materials and only able to access the archives for these two authors. Should future research proceed this thesis, I would hope to further this archival work and consider more fully the influence and impact of some of the marketing processes referenced above.

ethnicity' in the millennium era publishing and literary marketplace, and this thesis identifies the period between 2000 and 2005 as a key era in mixed-race fiction, where being mixed race was eminently saleable.[10] I argue that the attention garnered by the authors considered, marks a peak in contemporary social interest with mixed race more broadly, as reflected through the fascination with the authors noted.

In the years that followed, although social interest in mixed race peaked again in 2012/2013 in the wake of the London Olympics – both in relation to the inclusion of a mixed-race family in Danny Boyles' opening ceremony and the success of heptathlete Jessica Ennis-Hill – this interest was not necessarily reflected in British literary output until 2016, converging with the publication of Zadie Smith's long anticipated fourth novel *Swing Time*. Having achieved global acclaim and success, Smith's novel of two mixed-race girls growing up in London, reintroduced the mixed-race figure within mainstream literature and catalysed renewed attention to Smith's own cultural persona. In a British cultural climate preparing for the induction of mixed-race American actress Meghan Markle into the royal family, Smith's novel again represented a renewed interest in mixed race explored within the media and literature. In the years that followed, Kunzru's latest novel *White Tears* (2017) was published, Smith herself published essay collection *Feel Free: Essays* (2018), and Diana Evans published her third novel *Ordinary People* (2018). This thesis takes these authors' debut novels and latest works within its scope, to map the shifting discourses of mixed race throughout the twenty-first century. Sika Dagbovie-Mullins argues that the 'racial issues of an individual are the issues of the nation'.[11] Studying the profile of these authors and their work, which have come to embody, and disseminate, cultural and social ideas about mixed

[10] James Procter, 'New Ethnicities, the Novel, and the Burdens of Representation' in *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. by James F. English (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 101 – 120 (p.111).
[11] Sika A. Dagbovie-Mullins, *Crossing B(l)ack: Mixed-Race Identity in Modern American Fiction and Culture* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2013), p.95.

race, enables an overview of the ways in which discourses of mixed race have been mobilised since the start of the millennium.

More specifically, this thesis posits that the racial identity of these authors was utilised as a central tenet of the marketing campaigns for their novels, so that both author and text became vehicles for representing Britain as a tolerant, progressive space. The success and popularity of these novelists and their work, and the publicity they continue to command, has ensured that the literary marketplace is a key distributor of ideas and discourses about mixedness and race more generally. Through an examination of the marketing of mixed-race authors, this thesis considers the ways in which discourses of mixed race are created and disseminated through the literary economy to wider contemporary British society. It takes a two-pronged approach to its analysis, combining an examination of the representation of mixed race through the publishing industry and the media, with an exploration of the ways in which mixed race is presented within contemporary British fiction, to identify the modes of race and mixedness that the novels make available. Caballero and Aspinall argue that 'longstanding pathologisations [of mixed-race] are still at play'[12] within contemporary society because the 'history of racial mixing and mixedness [has] long been presented to us largely through […] the prurient gaze of middle-class observers peering through lens clouded by class, racial, gender, sexual and political anxieties'(p.7). Mixedness has historically been presented through external forces, predominantly white, middle class lenses, the consequence of which is the perpetuation of the idea of mixedness as problematic, extraordinary or aberrant. This thesis acts as an intervention into these narratives, with the dual aim of exposing these 'observed' identities and creating breathing room for alternative narratives and 'expressed' identities.[13]

[12] Caballero and Aspinall, p.6.
[13] Peter J. Aspinall and Miri Song, *Mixed Race Identities* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.21.

MIXED MEANINGS

Whilst authors such as Smith, Kunzru, Ali and Evans have been considered by multiple critics within the fields of postcolonial studies, black British literature and British Asian literature respectively, this thesis forms the first sustained investigation of these authors in the context of mixed-race writing and studies. Identified as the fastest growing demographic in Britain, it has been predicted that 'the mixed group will be the largest ethnic minority group by 2020' (p.179). Despite this, however, mixedness remains 'one of most remarkable, and yet least discussed, social developments in modern Britain'.[14] Until recently, much of the academic enquiry into mixed race has emerged from the USA, where racial mixing has a history and context different to that of the UK, but also where critical mixed-race studies is an established, and interdisciplinary, field of investigation, encompassing sociology and psychology, as well as cultural, media and literary studies. The UK has a longstanding history and fascination with racial mixing, but there has only been intermittent critical interest in mixed race in a British context: mixed-race studies exists as an aspect of interrelated disciplines – Black British studies, sociology – without being a recognised field in itself. This thesis will contribute to the gaps in the knowledge base, and the establishment of mixed-race studies as an interdisciplinary field of research, in its consideration of mixed race in relation to the literary and publishing fields. In dialogue with the work of American critics like Sika Dagbovie-Mullins and Michele Elam, who examine the representation of mixed race in American literature and art, this thesis will bring the analysis of mixedness into the British literary field. In doing so, this thesis moves the analysis of mixed race outside of the

[14] Rob Ford, Rachael Jolley, Sunder Katwala and Binita Mehta, 'The melting pot generation: How Britain became more relaxed on race', *British Future* (London: British Future, 2012), p.4.

parameters of sociology to consider the ways in which discourses of mixed race are constructed through contemporary British literature and the media materials – author profiles and interviews, book reviews – that accompany these novels into the marketplace.

At this juncture it is important to note the influence of the pre-eminent scholars of British mixed race, Peter Aspinall, Chamion Caballero and Miri Song, whose work on mixed-race identity has provided a sustained investigation into British mixed-race identity. Whilst their work usually focuses on the identity formation of mixed-race individuals, Caballero and Aspinall's recent book, *Mixed Race Britain in the Twentieth Century*, takes a wider focus, investigating the presence of Britain's mixed-race population within society and culture across the last century. Their study provides the first in-depth, socio-historic investigation into mixed race in Britain. Caballero and Aspinall state the importance of fleshing out ideas about mixed race by studying external representations of mixed race alongside 'insider-led frameworks'.[15] As such, the first part of each chapter of their study investigates the wider cultural and theoretical interpretations of mixed race during a specified time period, whilst the latter section of the chapter follows individual case studies of mixed-race families and communities. Their study essentially historicises ideas about mixed race in Britain, providing a detailed overview of the ways in which mixedness has been represented in British culture and experienced by mixed people, and those in interracial relationships, combining cultural analysis alongside a sociological approach. Caballero and Aspinall's study is significant, in its breadth and its singularity, and as such this introduction draws from it in order to foreground the social context of British mixed race into which the texts considered within this thesis emerge, refer to and often rework.

The cost of the long view taken by Caballero and Aspinall, however, is that whilst they are able to provide a comprehensive history of mixed race in Britain, their study lacks an

[15] Caballero and Aspinall, p.479.

in-depth analysis of the cultural representations of mixedness, and the ways in which those representations contribute to social perceptions of mixedness and interracial relationships. Caballero and Aspinall identify literature as a key 'contact zone' (p.94) in which people interact with ideas of mixed race, commenting upon the 'longstanding literary interest in what was popularly labelled miscegenation' (p.4). As yet, however, there is no sustained discussion of the discourses of mixed race disseminated through contemporary British fiction, in their study or elsewhere. This thesis, as well as providing the first sustained investigation of mixed race within British literature, answers Caballero and Aspinall's call to examine external representations of mixed race alongside 'insider-led' explorations of mixedness.

Although mixed race only became a recognised identity category in 2001, when it was included as an option on the British census, Caballero and Aspinall demonstrate that Britain has a long-standing history and fascination with mixedness and interracial relationships. Many contemporary narratives of race imply that racial heterogeneity is a new development in British demographics, usually attributed to the 1948 arrival of the Windrush that signalled a period of mass immigration from the colonies. In recent years there has been a concerted effort within literature to revise this narrative. Studies such as David Olusoga's *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (2016) and Miranda Kaufmann's *Black Tudors: The Untold Story* (2017) illustrate the presence of black people in Britain tracing back to the Roman period, and literary works, such as Bernardine Evaristo's *The Emperor's Babe,* re-insert black people into stories about Roman Britain. These works speak against the idea of racial homogeneity and the notion that people of different races and cultures have ever existed in isolation in Britain. In addition to demonstrating that 'interracial contact, liaisons

and unions were at the heart of the colonial and colonised experience', they also illustrate the centrality of literature to the project of re-contextualising Britishness.[16]

American academics such as Minelle Mahtani have argued that it is critical to remember that 'race mixing is *not* new', and, as Caballero and Aspinall's study details, fascination with interracial mixing can be traced back into British literature and art as far back as the sixteenth century.[17] Interest in mixedness and interracial relationships is notable in the works of Shakespeare and in the continual fascination with stories like that of Dido Elizabeth Belle, the eighteenth century mixed-race gentlewoman whose story was brought to the screen in 2013.[18] In more recent years, mixedness has been brought back to the fore of British literature through the work of mixed-race authors such as Hanif Kureishi, Bernardine Evaristo and Jackie Kay. Kureishi's seminal novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* was a pivotal intervention into late 80s/early 90s narratives of mixed race in which the mixed-race figure was typically presented as black and white, heterosexual, working-class and located within urban centres. In contrast, Kureishi's Karim Amir was a lower middle-class, bisexual, suburbanite who was vibrant and confident, and a central figure in Zadie Smith's own development:

> One of the 'new-breed', like me, like so many kids in our school, although the only other mentions of us I'd ever come across before were all of the 'tragic mulatto' variety. But the kids I knew were not tragic.[19]

[16] Caballero and Aspinall, p.2.
[17] Minelle Mahtani, *Mixed Race Amnesia: Resisting the Romanticization of Multiraciality* (Canada: University of British Columbia Press, 2014), p.6.
[18] *Belle*, dir. by Amma Asante (Fox Searchlight, 2013).
[19] Zadie Smith, 'Introduction' in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Hanif Kureishi (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), p.vi.

Kureishi's literary representation of mixed race provided an essential, and importantly mainstream, counter-narrative to the discourses of mixed race that were teaching children that there was something troubling about their racial identity. In turn, Kureishi's iteration of mixed race illustrated to Zadie Smith that not only was British literature more diverse than Dickens and Keats, laying the foundation for Irie Jones and Millat Iqbal, but it provided her with a conduit through which she could recognise, and validate, her own mixedness. It is this social value of the mixed-race text that this thesis recognises. The mixed-race writing of the 1990s – key mixed-race texts such as Jackie Kay's *The Adoption Papers* (1991) and Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* (1997) – tended towards reiterating earlier discourses of mixedness, characterised by a sense of dislocation and a lack of belonging, and, in the case of Kay's work, centred around transracial adoption, a longstanding area of academic interest in mixed race. Whilst Zadie Smith's iteration of mixed-race identity in *White Teeth* is a seminal addition to the oeuvre of mixed-race fiction, I argue in chapter five that it often falls back on these same narratives of crisis and the tragic mulatto. It is in the fiction of Kunzru and Evans, as chapters two and four examine, and the later work of Smith, that the Kureishi-esque potential of literary mixedness is re-invoked.

In recent years British non-fiction has become an important site for reconsidering and addressing Britain's racial history and its continuing legacies. Catalysed by the popular success of accessible texts like Olusoga's revisionist history *Black and British* and Reni-Eddo Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* (2017), there has been a recent increase in mainstream non-fiction texts centred in mixed race. Eddo-Lodge's award-winning, bestselling success foreshadowed a trend for revisionist investigations into Britain's racial past and present. Interestingly, Eddo-Lodge's successors in this emerging market combined their own interventions with biographical explorations of their experiences of growing up mixed race in Britain. Afua Hirsch's 2018 bestselling exploration of race

relations in the UK and memoir *Brit(ish)*: *On Race, Identity and Belonging*, details her experience of growing up mixed race in Britain, as does British rapper and activist Akala's similarly positioned, semi-autobiographical text *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire*. Hirsch's text in particular reflects her experience of growing up mixed race in the 80s as one marked by feeling like she did not belong. Raquel Scherr Salgado argues that

> If mixed race theory has a narrative, it is embodied in the tension, conflicts and deliberations that inhere in discursive genres like the personal essay or memoir, which remain the voiced alternatives to official histories or systematic philosophies.[20]

The non-fiction nature of the memoir, in addition to the prominence afforded to these particular narratives – both authors were already established media figures and both texts were heavily promoted – are brought to the market imbued with a sense of authority and fact. It is significant that these newly prominent accounts of mixed-race experience and identity also reignite narratives of mixed race that seemed redundant in the mid-noughties. Both the ostensibly positive celebratory discourses and older, more insidious discourses, are being resurrected in an increasingly fractured social and political environment. Hirsch's narrative discusses her feelings of isolation and un-belonging growing up mixed race in wealthy Wimbledon in the 1980s, whilst Akala's details his experience of being continually failed by an education system that viewed him as another troubled, mixed-race youth. Both narratives, whilst expressions of their authors' individual experiences, are also rooted in the pathologies and social context of the 1980s, where mixedness was understood as a problematic subject position. As with the 2018 stage iteration of *White Teeth*, however, those discourses of

[20] Raquel Scherr Salgado, 'Misceg-narrations' in *Mixing It Up: Multiracial Subjects*, ed. by SanSan Kwan and Kenneth Spiers (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 31-70 (p.53).

mixedness are being re-invoked, and commissioned, in 2018 despite the fact that alternative, more recent and less traumatic, narratives of mixed race in the twenty-first century are emerging. It is vital to identify and envision new narratives of race to continue to move our understanding forward and away from cyclical frameworks of race that perpetuate racisms and power inequities. Whilst these narratives are not currently being offered in the contemporary non-fiction examinations of race mentioned above, I argue that we can identify new thought models of mixedness in the literature of the authors considered within this study.

Where literary mixed race has been discussed in a critical sense, it has often been footnoted or referred to as an area that requires further investigation.[21] Mixed race has typically been subsumed into monoracial categories of Black British Literature/British Asian Literature, or discussed in the sense of urban multiculturalism more broadly, without consideration of the specifically mixed aspect of popular fictions of this type across the twenty-first century.[22] Mark Stein's *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* considers Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* in the same field as Hanif Kureishi's *Buddha of Suburbia*, as examples of what he terms 'black British novel[s] of transformation', fiction that focuses on the '*formation* of its protagonists' but also 'the *transformation* of British society and cultural institutions'.[23] His inclusive terminology echoes older notions of political blackness that encompassed both black and Asian people within it, as an act of solidarity and in recognition of the shared experience of racism. Whilst Stein's cross-racial approach provides a space for this shared sense of solidarity in contemporary British writing, it

[21] Kehinde Andrews and Lisa Amanda Palmer (eds.), *Blackness in Britain* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016).
[22] Mark Stein, *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2004); Magali Cornier Michael (ed.), *Twenty-First Century British Fiction and the City* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Michael Perfect, *Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism: Diversity and the Millennial London Novel* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[23] Stein, p.xiii.

neglects the fact that these novels demonstrate a version of the black British bildungsroman that is specifically mixed, subsuming it again within more hegemonic notions of blackness.

This tendency to subsume considerations of mixedness within blackness is also evident in John McLeod's 2010 *Wasafiri* article. McLeod draws attention to the ways in which mixed-race characters in the fiction of Caryl Phillips and Diana Evans function as a 'crucial *figurative* mode of representation', that 'challenges the parochialism […] of terms like 'black', 'British' and so forth'.[24] Although McLeod's study takes within its scope the function of the mixed-race protagonist as a 'post-racial alternative to myths of racial and national purity' (p.49), his analysis forms only a subsection of the limited space of a journal article, the focus of which is the renaming of the category black British literature to 'black writing of Britain' (p.51). Despite his argument that the mixed-race figure is 'crucial' to these contemporary discourses, and debates about the definition and categorisation of blackness, it remains on the periphery of investigation, both in McLeod's study, mirroring the marginalisation of mixedness, and within the wider field of literary criticism.

Although authors like Caryl Phillips, Zadie Smith and Andrea Levy are often discussed by literary critics, both as part of a racially hyphenated British canon and British literary fiction more generally, mixed race is never the sole focus of sustained investigation. The authors considered within this study are often discussed in relation to Black British/British Asian fiction and, whilst this is entirely valid, this approach neglects the important consideration of mixed race that I would argue is central to texts such as *White Teeth* and *The Impressionist*. As I argue in chapter four regarding the classification of Evans' texts as part of a genre of African fiction, continuing to consider these texts as explicitly black or Asian texts, perpetuates the notion that mixed race can be encompassed in

[24] John McLeod, 'Extra Dimensions, new routines: Contemporary black writing of Britain', *Wasafiri*, 25:4 (2010), 45 – 52 (pp. 46, 49).

monoracial, specifically racialised terms, undermining mixedness as an area of investigation and a mode of identity or representation.

This thesis aims to provide a productive middle ground, a space in which considering authors in terms of blackness or Asian-ness co-exists alongside mixedness. In her study on mixed-race identity in American literature, Dagbovie-Mullins argues for the notion of a 'black sentient mixed-race identity', which she defines as 'a mixed-race subjectivity that includes a particular awareness of the world, a perception rooted in blackness' that 'suggests a connection to a black consciousness that does not overdetermine one's racial identification but still plays a large role in it.'[25] Whilst this thesis does not utilise this specific terminology, it incorporates the thinking it is grounded in, a mode of mixedness that embodies both blackness/Asian-ness as a part of a mixed identity and perception. In doing so, my argument does not discount the ways in which these authors have been considered in relation to a black British/British Asian literary tradition and field of study, but considers their mixedness as a vital aspect and mode of being that validates mixedness as a subject position *and* a way of being black British/British Asian.

In the 2016 edited collection, *Blackness in Britain*, Kehinde Andrews argues that we should consider mixedness 'as a feature of the Black experience',[26] because blackness is 'a robust enough concept to explore difference whilst maintaining unity' (p.209). He warns against the idea of considering that 'being mixed by itself makes a community', as it 'reifies rather than subverts racial categories', yet highlights that it is 'important to recognise that [for people of mixed heritage] their articulation [of blackness] may play out in different ways […] that need to be acknowledged' (p.209). Andrews makes a crucial point here – although, despite his assertions, sustained consideration of mixedness within the collection is omitted –

[25] Dagbovie-Mullins, *Crossing B(l)ack*, p.2.
[26] Andrews, p.208.

about the need to identify mixedness as a differing, yet still interconnected, subject position and context, that is mobilised in similar but different ways. My argument heeds Andrews warning against thinking of mixedness as the basis for a community, yet recognises that there is a commonality of experience amongst mixed people that requires further investigation and deserves sustained focus and investigation.

Andrews' statements call attention to another issue regarding investigation into mixed race, in both Britain and the US. Almost all of the sociological studies concentrate on mixed race from an Afro-Caribbean/white perspective, with little sustained investigation into Asian/white or Chinese/white mixes – let alone non-white mixes - despite Caballero and Aspinall's study highlighting the prominence of interracial relationships within these groups. Ferne Louanne Regis' 2016 study, *The Trinidad Dougla: Identity, Ethnicity and Lexical Choice*, examines the mixed-race identities of people of African and Indian descent, yet in a cultural context that differs vastly from that of the UK.[27] Jinthana Haritaworn's 2012 study, *The Biopolitics of Mixing*, examines the mixed-race Thai population across Britain and Europe, and the ways in which it is represented and embodied, but it is one of very few studies that privilege mixedness outside of the traditionally black and white dynamic *and* focuses on the UK.[28] In contrast to previous studies that have considered the work of authors such as Zadie Smith, Monica Ali, Hari Kunzru and Diana Evans in relation to notions of black British/British Asian literature that continue to insist upon a separation within these representations, this thesis takes a cross-racial approach. It is important to recognise the different contexts of the black British and British Asian experience and history in Britain, and this thesis acknowledges those different contexts, but also recognises the similarities and

[27] Ferne Louanne Regis, *The Trinidad Dougla: Identity, Ethnicity and Lexical Choice* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).
[28] Jinthana Haritaworn, *The Biopolitics of Mixing: Thai Multiracialities and Haunted Ascendancies* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012).

parallels across the mixed-race experience and in the ways mixed race functions within society. I take a cross-racial approach, not to suggest a mixed-race group identity or to negate the different racial experience and context of mixedness, but to provide the opportunity to identify the parallels in the ways in which mixed race is mobilised across racial boundaries. Although the authors included within the remit of this study have been considered within the field of black British studies and British Asian studies, this thesis is the first attempt to consider these authors within a framework of mixed race, as contributors to an emerging oeuvre of literary work that both constructs, and challenges, discourses of mixedness in Britain today.

In the wider field of literary studies, however, there is an increasingly cross-racial approach to the study of postcolonial literature, particularly literature focused on urban, multicultural centres such as London. Michael Perfect's 2014 study, *Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism*, reads the work of Smith, Levy, Kureishi, Malkani and Ali as seminal texts in an emerging genre of fiction, reflective of a developing market for literature concerning multicultural London. Interestingly, whilst Perfect's cross-racial approach is productive in relation to his argument about the saleability of multicultural fictions, it overlooks the fact that half of the authors it considers are mixed race, neglecting an important opportunity to examine the significance of mixed race to the appeal of these fictions within the marketplace and the interrelation of ideas of mixed race and multiculturalism.

Sara Upstone's recent study, *Rethinking Race and Identity in Contemporary British Fiction*, also takes a cross-racial approach, considering authors from a variety of different racial and ethnic backgrounds - including Smith, Evaristo and Kay - alongside others such as Meera Syal, Julian Barnes and Kazuo Ishiguro. Upstone argues that through the strategic use of the realist form, these novels combine 'realism with optimistic, future-thinking narrative arcs and social relationships' that 'encourages readers to invest in these futures as almost-

possibles', pointing to utopian, post-race possibilities, rather than realities.[29] Upstone terms this particular mobilisation of the form 'realist utopias' and this thesis is interested in thinking about this idea and questioning whether mixed race is being mobilised in similar ways – as a 'celebratory utopia' through the media mobilisation of the mixed-race celebrity author and as an expression of a future possible, 'realist utopia' in the fiction of these authors (p.15).

The intention of this thesis is to acknowledge and critically examine the relevance and specificity of mixedness to the marketing of the authors considered, whilst at the same time recognising the centrality of mixedness within their work and the alternative narratives of mixedness they make available, outside of, and often in contradiction of, these marketing imperatives. Moving forward from studies such as Stein's, which does not differentiate mixedness from blackness, or Perfect's, which fails to acknowledge the importance of mixedness to the success of these authors and texts, this thesis considers mixedness as an interconnected, yet crucially different space to that of blackness/Asian-ness, not to replicate racial hierarchies of privilege but to provide space to consider mixedness as valid within its own right. This thesis foregrounds mixedness, in full awareness of critics such as Andrews and Dagbovie, who warn against the dangers of privileging mixedness in ways that perpetuate racial hierarchies and continue to uphold notions of white supremacy by presenting it as a 'more palatable form of blackness'.[30] I recognise that the ways in which these authors have often been represented with the media have tended towards offering mixedness as a racialised form of cultural capital and privilege that functions differently to monoracial notions of blackness and Asian-ness. In centring mixed race, my aim is not to contribute to this hierarchy and further privilege a minority of well-established authors, but to

[29] Sara Upstone, *Rethinking Race and Identity in Contemporary British Fiction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), p.13.
[30] Dagbovie-Mullins, *Crossing B(l)ack,* p.11.

recognise the specificity of mixedness and the ways in which it functions intra and extra-textually and contribute to the effort to establish critical mixed-race studies as a valid and vital interdisciplinary field of study within the UK.

Where mixed race has received sustained critical attention is within the fields of social work and sociology. Critical interest to mixed race emerged from the field of social work in the late 1980s and early 1990s, coalescing around debates regarding transracial adoption. There was a spate of critical investigation into the identity formation of mixed-race children in the work of sociologists like Anne Wilson (1987), Tizard and Phoenix (1993), Ilan Katz (1996), Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (2001) and Suki Ali (2003).[31] Their studies sought to understand the salience of mixed race as an identity option and the impact of mixedness on the identity formation of children. Whilst many of these studies spoke against the idea of mixed-race children as 'between cultures', and illustrated that for many mixed-race children identity formation was free from racial trauma, they all take negative pathologies of mixedness as their starting point, working from the assumption that mixedness is something that needs to be reconciled. During this period mixed race was frequently represented as a fractured identity that needed to be reconciled through monoracial affiliation.

Caballero and Aspinall's study historicises the shifts in pathologies of mixedness across recent British history, arguing that the advent of the twentieth century marked a shift in perceptions of mixedness. The eighteenth century was marked by 'a diverse black presence' that 'was clearly settled in the country', where racial mixing was not uncommon

[31] Anne Wilson, *Mixed Race Children: A Study of Identity* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987); Barbara Tizard and Ann Phoenix, *Race and Racism in the Lives of Young People of Mixed Parentage* (London: Routledge, 2002); Ilan Katz, *The Construction of Racial Identity in Children of Mixed Parentage* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1996); Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *Mixed Feelings: The Complex Lives of Mixed Race Britons* (London: The Women's Press, 2001); Suki Ali, *Mixed-Race, Post-Race: Gender, New Ethnicities and Cultural Practises* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

and relatively free of the scrutiny and hostility of later years.[32] The nineteenth century was characterised by the 'emergence of relationships between newly settled Chinese and Lascar men […] and white women' (p.2), and again, whilst interracial relationships were 'viewed unfavourably in certain quarters […] they did not provoke universal condemnation' and were not unlawful, as they were in the US (p.3). As the nineteenth century progressed, 'white British attitudes towards other races […] became more openly and unashamedly aggressive during the imperial expansion of the nineteenth century' (p.4). The twentieth century marked a shift in perceptions and attitudes regarding mixedness and interracial relationships, crystallising into narratives that continue to circulate around the mixed-race figure in contemporary Britain today. Jayne Ifekwunigwe identifies two ages of mixed race within the twentieth century, an 'age of pathology […] focused on miscegenation, moral degeneracy and genetics' and an 'age of celebration',[33] in which the 'impossibly burdened' mixed-race figure became imbued with the hope for a post-race future (p.6). The start of the twentieth century was defined by a sense of mixed race as a marker of degeneracy, steeped in the racial biologism of the nineteenth century and exacerbated by post-war migration that resulted in closer contact between Britain's white and non-white population. Attitudes towards mixedness and interracial relationships hardened during the interwar period amidst concerns about the 'pollution of the white race', particularly the corruption of white women entering into interracial relationships that were increasingly visible as a result of the post-war demographic changes.[34]

As a consequence, interracial families were increasingly the target of government intervention that resulted in separation, with state intervention informing perceptions about the tragic 'in-betweenness' of mixed-race children and debates about transracial adoption.

[32] Caballero and Aspinall, p.2.
[33] Quoted in Mahtani, p.32.
[34] Caballero and Aspinall, p.9.

The sense of the mixed-race individual as explicitly degenerate mutated in the 1970s and 1980s into pathologies of a generation of mixed-race children that had 'no place to call home' and were 'torn and confused about their racial identity', conceptions of mixed race that had a huge impact on mixed-race children in the care system.[35] Concerns about the trauma caused by placing mixed-race children with white families focused on the idea that without a black role model as a resource for the development of a positive black identity, mixed-race children would suffer psychologically. As such, 'by the end of the 1980s the preference for same-race placements, including the practise of identifying mixed-race children as black, was firmly established'.[36]

Although studies, such as the ones listed above, attempted to challenge these narratives from the late 80s onwards, the field of social work remained a space which 'continued to highlight troubling issues' and perceptions about the assumed racial identification of mixed-race individuals and the psychological impact of being mixed race (p.435). Transracial adoption continues to be a focal point for critical investigation into mixed-race identity and is often a site through which sociological study and literary enquiry coalesce. John McLeod's most recent work, *Life Lines: Writing Transcultural Adoption*, explores the representations of transracial and transcultural adoption in film and literature, through which he examines the 'pain and possibilities' of transcultural adoption.[37] In this sense, the notion of transcultural adoption echoes Ifekwunigwe's thoughts about the opposing ideologies of mixed race, that of pathology and potential. Echoing the ethos of this thesis, McLeod's study identifies literature as a key space in which these ideologies are addressed and renegotiated.

[35] Mahtani, p.4.
[36] Caballero and Aspinall, p.429.
[37] John McLeod, *Life Lines: Writing Transcultural Adoption* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

This sociological approach to considering mixed race in Britain, and its implications for identity formation, was a driving force behind the 2001 decision to include mixed race as a census identity category, which in turn validated this sphere of critical study. Although critical interest in mixed race has fluctuated across the seventeen years since then, this sociological approach to considering mixed-race identity has remained a prominent one.[38] Whilst the studies mentioned have been integral in constructing and contributing to a scholarship of mixed race in the UK, there are also gaps in the knowledge base that hinder a more fulsome understanding of the ways in which mixedness is represented, mobilised, and signified in British society and culture. As Caballero and Aspinall identify, many of the studies regarding mixed-race identity have focused on children, the consequence of which is that mixedness has historically been presented as a 'static childhood state' rather than an evolving identity.[39]

The primary focus on identity formation in childhood, and in the frame of social work, has also tended to cohere with discourses of mixed-race identity that emphasise mixed-race identity as an unsettled space, marred by feelings of inferiority and a lack of belonging, and as a subject position defined by outside forces. This pathology has proved difficult to shift, regardless of studies like Suki Ali's or Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's that attempt to speak against this presentation of the mixed-race figure as a marginal one. In 2007 Trevor Phillips, then Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, was quoted in *The Times* as stating that mixed children suffer from '"identity stripping,"' and being '"marooned between communities"', perpetuating the established discourse of interracial relationships and mixing as a detriment to children who will end up confused about their racial/ethnic identity.[40] The

[38] Numerous studies conducted by Peter J. Aspinall (2008, 2009, 2013, 2015), Aspinall and Song (2013), Remi Joseph-Salisbury (2016, 2017, 2018).
[39] Caballero and Aspinall, p.433.
[40] Jessica Mai Sims (ed.), *Mixed Heritage – Identity, Policy and Practise, The Runnymede Trust* (London: The Runnymede Trust, 2007), p.2.

tenacity of this discourse, in spite of evidence to the contrary, illustrates an explicit, and very public, 'residue of societal unease' attached to the idea of racial mixing in Britain that continues to proliferate in socio-political discourse.[41] In shifting the focus of the examination from predominantly black and white mixed-race children to that of developed, adult authors in a cross–racial approach, this study aims to move the study of mixed race in a direction that allows for a fuller, more developed iteration of mixedness.

Narratives of mixed race shifted again in the 1990s, as mixed-race people were increasingly visible in the media and arts, betokening a 'national story of a more tolerant, multi-ethnic and multicultural Britain'.[42] This narrative was mobilised most heavily in the campaign for the New Labour government, who campaigned successfully on the promise of a 'New Labour. New Britain' and instituted multiculturalism as both a vision for a rebranded Britain and an official government policy for the management of an increasingly diverse, and tense, population.[43] New Labour's campaign focused on rebranding Britain as 'Cool Britannia' and, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, mixed-race figures became embedded within narratives of celebratory multiculturalism and emblematic of a newly diverse, progressive Britain at the start of the twenty-first century. As the age of multiculturalism drew to a close in the mid noughties, amidst increasingly tense race relations post 9/11 and the London tube and bus bombings of 2005, interest in mixed race dwindled, along with the over exposure of mixed-race authors and stories. The advent of mixed-race multiculturalism as heralded by Zadie Smith's epochal success in 2000 had waned by the time Diana Evans' *26a* was published to middling success in 2005.

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[41] Peter J. Aspinall and Miri Song, *Mixed Race Identities* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.9.
[42] Caballero and Aspinall, p.422.
[43] Justin Parkinson, 'The rise and fall of New Labour', *BBC News*, 3 August 2010 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-10518842> [accessed 2 January 2019].

After the 2011 census revealed that 'over one million people (two per cent) of the population are of mixed race', a demographic which 'is expected to more than double over the next 30 years',[44] it prompted a resurgence in public interest in mixed race and a movement towards conceptualising the mixed-race individual as 'extraordinary, exceptional and more attractive'.[45] In 2012 *British Future* published a report entitled 'The Melting Pot Generation – How Britain became more relaxed on race', in which it proclaimed that the younger, 'Jessica Ennis generation' were decidedly unconcerned about racial mixing and that attitudes towards intermarriage in Britain had relaxed significantly over the past three decades.[46] *British Future*'s report posited that the public's unequivocal support for mixed-race sports stars such as Jessica Ennis and Lewis Hamilton - who topped their 'Gen Ennis Ten' list of most prominent mixed-race cultural figures - as well as musicians such as Leona Lewis, was an indication of progression in attitudes towards racial mixing (p.10). The report found that less than fifty percent of the British public were aware of Jessica Ennis' mixed-race background, suggesting that perhaps this was due to a decline of race as an important factor in public estimation or that, in the case of British cultural figures who have an international presence, her national British identity achieves 'master status' in public perceptions, the success of her 2012 Olympic performance a point of national pride and achievement.[47]

Whilst the increased critical attention to the British mixed-race population was welcome and necessary, the conclusions of reports such as *British Future*'s seem insubstantially optimistic. The examples provided of mixed-race cultural figures that have

[44] Danuta Kean (ed.), *Writing the Future: Black and Asian Writers and Publishers in the UK Marketplace* (London: Arts Council England, 2015), p.3.
[45] Peter J. Aspinall, 'Social representations of 'mixed-race' in early twenty-first-century Britain: content, limitations and counter-narratives', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38:7 (2015), 1067 – 1083 (p.1074).
[46] Ford et al, *Melting Pot Generation*, p.2.
[47] Aspinall and Song, p.127.

transcended societal boundaries of race cohere with the shift in contemporary representations of mixed race, away from the conception of mixedness as a marker of hybrid degeneracy to a more modern concept of mixed-race individuals as extraordinary and gifted:

> The 'mixed-race' individual as extraordinary, exceptional and more attractive is now the ascendant representation, melding the idea of the new 'transition generation' of today's youth […] with notions of 'new', 'gifted' and 'special' people. High achieving 'mixed-race' individuals have been elevated to 'poster figures' for this community.[48]

Will Harris has termed this representational figure the 'mixed-race superhero'[49] and Aspinall argued in his 2015 study, that this impossibly extraordinary figure was now the 'ascendant representation' of the mixed-race population.[50] This can be seen in the renewed focus on mixed race in 2011. *Channel Four* produced a documentary entitled 'Is It Better To Be Mixed Race?' which examined whether a heterogeneous gene pool resulted in healthier – and more attractive – people and the BBC commissioned a three-part series entitled *Mixed Britannia* (2011) exploring the history of racial mixing in the UK. Mixed-race families featured in the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympics and were consecrated in stone outside the Library of Birmingham, as the winning entry into the 'This is Birmingham' art project and the representation of its local community. The 'Jessica Ennis Generation' as it was termed, symbolised the exceptionalism of the mixed-race individual and exemplified the ways in which mixed-race figures were once again tasked with projecting an image of Britain as a tolerant, diverse nation. The 'poster figures' listed in British Future's report – Jessica

[48] Aspinall, 'Social representations of 'mixed-race', p.1074.
[49] Will Harris, *Mixed-Race Superman* (London: Peninsula Press, 2018), p.11.
[50] Aspinall, 'Social representations of 'mixed-race', p.1074.

Ennis, Lewis Hamilton – are very similar to the examples listed in Peter Aspinall's 2015 study - Ashley Cole, Emeli Sande. The most prominent social exemplars of mixed race proffered were either sportspeople or musicians, historically two areas in which non-white people are 'permitted to excel […] for the delectation of whites', and, are able to embody a British identity on an international stage.[51] The same sense of contingent Britishness is evident in pathologisations of the mixed-race figure as marginal and in-between and in the conditional embrace of the figure of the 'mixed-race superhero', for whom acceptance is conferred upon proof of exceptionalism. It is also important to note that 'fewer than half of Britons recognise Jessica Ennis as mixed race' in *British Future*'s study, questioning how far this embrace of mixed-race figures such as Ennis-Hill, or Meghan Markle, is enabled by their European features and light skin, their ability to pass as white.[52]

In the last two years, mixed-race representation has peaked once again within the social and cultural sphere in Britain, heralded perhaps in part by the engagement announcement between Prince Harry and mixed-race American actress Meghan Markle. In a similar sense to the ways in which Smith's profile was used as an advertisement for a more tolerant and diverse British population in 2000, there is a sense in which Markle's profile has been used to the same effect, as proof of an increasingly modern British royal family. An article in *Time* magazine argued that 'Markle shows how "attitudes change" in the space of a single generation […] Meghan's entrance into British public life shows a royal family moving in line with the times.'[53] Another article in the *Metro* interpreted Markle as 'the role model for every non-white girl in this country', an example for all mixed-race children

[51] Ellis Cashmore, *Beyond Black: Celebrity and Race in Obama's America* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), p.6.
[52] Ford et al, p.2.
[53] Tara John, '5 Ways Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's Engagement is Groundbreaking', *Time*, 27 November 2017 <http://time.com/5037634/meghan-markle-engagement-prince-harry-groundbreaking/> [accessed 2 January 2019].

growing up in Britain.[54] Ideas about British tolerance, modernity and embrace of interracial relationships are bound within the symbolism of a mixed-race British princess. As Piers Morgan stated in an article for the *Daily Mail*, 'finally, the Royal Family could have non-white members to more accurately reflect the gloriously multi-cultural nation over which they reign'.[55] In the aftermath of the engagement, there was a marked upsurge in the representation of mixed-race people in advertisements, confirming that 'diversity has become more in vogue' once again.[56] Major British retail brands such as John Lewis, Debenhams, Morrisons and even the government TV licensing agency, featured mixed-race families in their Christmas 2017 promotional media, harkening back to the idea of mixed-race people heralding a harmonious and multicultural Britain, but also emphasising the saleability and increased economic value of mixedness.

For each instance since 2000 in which mixed-race people and interracial families have been offered as proof of a celebratory, and successful, multiculturalism, there has been reactionary opposition – as the following chapters will show – that illustrates the pervasiveness of earlier discourses of mixed race steeped in racism and prejudice. Although there were articles that proclaimed joy at the interracial union of Meghan Markle and Harry, there were also many articles that revealed the underlying tension running beneath these superficially celebratory proclamations. The rhetoric surrounding Markle when the engagement was officially announced, mirrored that with which the notion of NHS tourism is

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[54] Miranda Larbi, 'It's a great day for interracial relationships and mixed race girls everywhere', *Metro*, 27 November 2017 <https://metro.co.uk/2017/11/27/its-a-great-day-for-interracial-relationships-and-mixed-race-girls-everywhere-7111147/> [accessed 2 January 2019].

[55] Piers Morgan, 'Harry marrying a spunky American divorcee would have sent the British Royal Family into a fury 80 years ago', *The Daily Mail*, 15 December 2016 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4037108/Harry-marrying-spunky-American-divorcee-sent-British-Royal-Family-fury-80-years-ago-Meghan-succeed-countless-English-gals-failed-making-Harry-settle-make-sure-marries-ASAP.html> [accessed 2 January 2019].

[56] Afua Hirsch, *Brit(ish): On Race, Identity and Belonging* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2018), p.145.

often discussed; as a calculated effort to capitalise on British resources. *Daily Mail* columnist Rachel Johnson wrote:

> She's divorced and, as soon as she met Prince Harry, she is said to have dropped her gorgeous chef boyfriend like a hot brick, as she reeled in the biggest fish in the dating universe by not replying to Harry's texts for several days (that old trick!).

Johnson goes on to state that

> Harry needs a sticker, a tremendous, limpet-like sticker, like Sophie Wessex. Or Kate Middleton. Nobody cares that Miss Markle is mixed race or a tease, but racy is a different story. Racy is not official Wife Material.[57]

Whilst this is framed as an emotional attachment to the Royal Family – Johnson claims she is assessing Markle as she would 'a future daughter-in-law' – and the objections raised framed in relation to her sexualised persona on American TV, the undertones of her rhetoric suggest otherwise. Not only does she fall back on established stereotypes of the over-sexualised, manipulative mixed-race woman but, even as she is declaring that her objections are not because of Markle's race, she proclaims that the only appropriate women for Harry to marry are white. The tone of Johnson's article suggests that British society is comfortable with racial difference at a distance, through a television set, but not within the family on a personal level, or symbolically within the royal family. This feeling was expressed directly by the royal who wore a Blackamoor broach to a lunch at Buckingham Palace in the wake of Harry

[57] Rachel Johnson, 'Sorry Harry, but your beautiful bolter has failed my Mum Test', *Daily Mail*, 6 November 2016 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-3909362/RACHEL-JOHNSON-Sorry-Harry-beautiful-bolter-failed-Mum-Test.html> [accessed 3 January 2019].

and Meghan's engagement announcement and the UKIP leader who was urged to quit after it emerged that his girlfriend had been sending out racist tweets about Markle.[58] The backlash in the aftermath of the royal engagement suggests that whilst people of mixed race are utilised as poster images of a tolerant, post-race Britain, deep racial inequities exist underneath this surface multiculturalism that continue to fracture British society along racialised lines.

Across the last two decades, though interest has been highly concentrated in specific periods, public and political preoccupation with mixed race in Britain has been sustained and intense. The role of the mixed-race cultural figure – be that athlete, musician, Royal or author – has been inseparable from the narratives of mixed race that have dominated the twenty-first century. It has functioned in various ways, often embodying multiple subject positions simultaneously; as a synecdoche for a multicultural Britain, an example of biologically determined exceptionalism and a marginal, tragic figure. The mixed-race figure has become a useful tool in government and media strategies for redirecting the narrative of national identity, the poster image of how Britain desires to be seen on the global stage. Examining the recent context for mixed race in Britain has illustrated that two things are essential if we are to understand the continued significance of mixedness in contemporary British society. Firstly, a sustained examination of the role of the British mixed-race cultural figure – a position of authority that has been bestowed upon authors such Zadie Smith and Hari Kunzru, who offer a transatlantic audience for these new narratives of Britishness – in the

[58] Patrick Greenfield, 'Princess Michael of Kent apologises for 'racist jewellery' won at lunch with Meghan Markle', *The Guardian*, 23 December 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/dec/22/princess-michael-apologises-wearing-racist-jewellery-meghan-markle-christmas-lunch> [accessed 3 January 2019].
Jessica Elgot, 'UKIP leader urged to quit over girlfriend's 'racist' Meghan Markle remarks', *The Guardian*, 14 January 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/jan/14/ukip-leader-henry-bolton-girlfriend-jo-marney-suspended-meghan-merkle> [accessed 3 January 2019].

construction of ideas about, and attitudes towards, mixed race in Britain. Secondly, that an urgent intervention into the continuously recycled and damaging narratives of mixed race is required in order to move our understanding of mixedness, and race more generally, forward; a need to move away from narratives of tragedy and exceptionalism and make mixed race ordinary and 'everyday'.[59] In combining an analysis of the public discourses of mixed race constructed through the media and marketing materials for authors of mixed race, with a consideration of the sense of mixedness those authors make available through their own work and expressions of identity, this thesis examines the ways in which these discourses are created and intervenes in these established narratives. This method of interpretation demonstrates the reality of mixed-race discourses, but also the possibility for a more progressive understanding of race and mixedness that is enabled through conceptualising mixed race.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

It is important to note at this point what this thesis is not: unlike critical studies of mixedness that have come before it, this thesis does not attempt to investigate the authors' personal constructions of their own mixed-race identity. Studies of mixed race conducted in Britain across the past two decades have tended towards a sociological investigation of identity construction, specifically amongst children. In 1993, Barbara Tizard and Ann Phoenix published *Black, White or Mixed Race?: Race and Racism in the Lives of Young People of Mixed Parentage*, their investigation into the identity formation of adolescents from black and white racial backgrounds and the racism they faced. Following on from this Ilan Katz's *The Construction of Racial Identity in Children of Mixed Parentage* (1996), crucially spoke

[59] Caballero and Aspinall, p.7.

against the idea of marginal mixedness that was informing social policy, yet the study itself is marketed as an examination of the ways in 'which inter-racial families deal with issues of identity and difference', as though mixedness is something to be overcome.[60] The language surrounding Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's 2001 study, *Mixed Feelings: The Complex Lives of Mixed Race Britons*, also reflects this tendency, described as an exploration of the 'particular problems of this growing and significant group', even as it exposes the social hostility to interracial relationships.[61] Suki Ali's 2003 text, *Mixed-Race, Post-Race: Gender, New Ethnicities and Cultural Practises*, reflects on the ways in which mixed race has functioned in social discourses and as a marker of racial progress, yet concludes by echoing these narratives in the suggestion that mixedness points to the potentiality of a post-race future.

These studies were instrumental in establishing mixed race as a field of study and a legitimate social category of identification. Whilst these studies provided an essential intervention into the field of mixed race, they also highlighted problems within the approaches to mixedness in the critical field and the debate about the terminology used to discuss it. Tizard and Phoenix's title highlights the societal impetus to definitively categorise the mixed-race population, reflecting the unease with assignations outside of established, binary notions of race. Alibhai-Brown's title foregrounds the sense of confusion often attributed to those from mixed-race backgrounds and Ali's title illustrates the ways in which Britain's increasing mixed-race population have been offered as the advent of a post-racial society. They also highlight the discrepancy regarding the terminology of mixed race; Ali and Alibhai-Brown refer to people as 'mixed race' – although only Ali hyphenates the term – whereas Katz and Tizard and Phoenix utilise the term 'mixed parentage'.

[60] Katz, book jacket.
[61] Alibhai-Brown, *Mixed Feelings*, book jacket.

Across the years there has been much critical debate over the language with which mixed race is discussed, alongside critical dissent to the continuation of a race-based language that perpetuates the notion of biologically distinct races. It has been established amongst critics that race is a socially and historically constructed concept and that there is a need in critical and cultural dialogues to work towards a vocabulary that moves us away from race.[62] Yet it cannot be denied that the legacies of race thinking endure in society. The increase in reported hate crimes since the EU referendum in 2016 provide a worrying reminder that racial discrimination remains an urgent issue in British society.[63] Whilst ideologically there is a need to move away from a language that perpetuates perceived racial differences and provides a springboard for racism, race continues to have a very real, lived impact for Britain's non-white population. As Gilroy argues, as long as that fact remains, a political language based on race 'remains necessary in a world where racisms continue to proliferate' and 'refusing race as a critical category would not do anything to undermine or interrupt these racisms'.[64] Rather than attempt to ideologically refute race in a political and cultural climate in which it retains its resonance and impact, this thesis uses racial terminology, analysing race in accordance with theorists such as Minelle Mahtani, who argues that race 'cannot be transcended, only understood and rearranged'.[65] In its analysis of the ways in which the authors considered speak to issues, and discourses, of race, this thesis attempts to contribute to the critical work of scholars such as Michele Elam, who posits that we 'must re-see race and, by doing so, begin to transform its meaning'.[66] Throughout the

[62] Peter J. Aspinall, 'Mixed race', 'mixed origins or what? Generic terminology for the multiple racial/ethnic group population', *Anthropology Today*, 25:2 (2009), 3 – 8.
[63] Matthew Weaver, 'Hate crime surge linked to Brexit and 2017 terror attacks', *The Guardian*, 16 October 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/oct/16/hate-crime-brexit-terrorist-attacks-england-wales> [accessed 3 January].
[64] Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993), p.14.
[65] Mahtani, p.42.
[66] Michele Elam, *The Souls of Mixed Folks: Race, Politics and Aesthetics in the New Millennium* (California: Stanford University Press, 2011), p.25.

course of this study, which looks at mixed-race identity, I will use the term mixed race, outside of quote marks, but in full awareness of the issues associated with racialised language and with the aim of contributing to a field of academic study that works towards a transformation of racial understanding.

Gilroy argues that race is a shifting term, its 'malleability' reflecting 'the precise but changing conditions in which racial groups become possible'.[67] This is evidenced by the shifting lexicon with which mixed race has been referenced, each term reflecting the shifting attitudes and conceptualisations of mixedness in its historical context but paving the way towards the establishment of mixed race as an official social identity in 2001. At the start of the twentieth century the term predominantly used to describe interracial relationships was miscegenation, a term steeped in the eugenics movement of the twentieth century that classified non-white people as an inferior species. This school of thought lead directly to derogatory terms such as 'half-breed', 'mongrel' and 'half-caste', used to identify the children of interracial relationships. Terms such as 'half-caste' were in common parlance in Britain until the 1980s, despite the overt racism of locating mixed-race people within a colour-based caste system and declaring them lesser than people of monoracial, presumably white, descent. In the nineties and early noughties terms like 'dual heritage' and 'dual ethnicity' briefly circulated as an attempt to move terminology away from a focus on race, towards a focus on cultural heritage. These terms were criticised, however, for limiting mixedness to only two categories when a substantial proportion of the mixed population have more than two mixes in their racial background. The move away from a language of race towards ethnicity and culture, however, is also problematic in its assumption that people of mixed race identify with two distinct cultures, when studies such as Tizard and Phoenix's and

[67] Paul Gilroy, 'You can't fool the youths…race and class formation in the 1980s', *Race and Class*, 23(2-3), (1981), 207 – 222 (p.208).

Ali's illustrate that mixed-race children growing up in Britain often identify primarily as British and construct their identity based in British culture and heritage.

'Mixed heritage' and 'mixed parentage' were briefly used as a way of encompassing multiple mixes, but terminology divorced from race neglects the impact of its lived, social effects. Whilst these terms did not limit the notion of mixing to two races, they lacked specificity; so often, when mixed race is discussed, it is the phenotypical aspect of race that is foregrounded and yet acknowledgement of this is neglected within this term. In more recent years 'mixed origins' has been adopted by governmental departments, in part to match the language of the Race Relations Act, and yet it similarly neglects the impact of race in relation to mixed-race individuals. In the late nineties, sociologists such as Jayne Ifekwunigwe suggested a reclamation of the word 'metisse', a term that she argues 'refers to someone who by virtue of parentage, embodies two or more world views'. [68] Whilst this term has a resonance in the US and has been championed by cultural critics like Gloria Anzaldua, it fails to clearly identify what 'two world views' means in this context and to encompass the experience of mixed-race people who identify predominantly with British culture. British critics such as Aspinall refuted the term on the grounds of 'elitism', ambiguity and irrelevance outside of the US.[69]

Aspinall has stated that the 'choice of terminology needs to fit in the context in which it is used' (p.8). Critics of the terms 'mixed race' have argued against its use due to the implication that 'pure' races exist and the suggestion that mixed race is somehow a weakening down of a pure race (p.4). In the US, critics of the term have also suggested that it perpetuates a hierarchy of race, further shifting minority races down in the racial hierarchy by

[68] Jayne Ifekwunigwe, *Scattered Belongings: Cultural Paradoxes of Race, Nation and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.18.
[69] Aspinall, ''Mixed race', 'mixed origins' or what?'', p.8.

suggesting mixed race is superior in being closer to whiteness.[70] Speaking against this idea, however, Aspinall and Song have argued that the heterogeneity encompassed within the category of mixedness complicates the notion of pure races and suggests a 'heterogeneous group in the making, rather than a group in any fixed sense'.[71] Although mixed race remains a problematic term for the reasons stated, it fits the current British context in which it is used. It provides space to identify as multiply mixed and acknowledges the continued impact of living in Britain as a racialised citizen. In addition, studies have continuously shown that mixed race remains the most 'salient general term of choice' for mixed-race subjects in Britain and, whilst this thesis acknowledges that this terminology remains problematic and contentious, it recognises that it has become an established and meaningful term for the British mixed-race population and as such is the most appropriate term of reference.[72]

METHODOLOGY

In her 2015 study *New Postcolonial British Genres*, Sarah Ilott argues that 'as a culturally diverse country, Britain needs something that transcends material, ethnic, economic and religious disparities to create a sense of shared national identity: it requires new modes of narration'.[73] In Ilott's definition 'narration is not the story but the way the story is told' (p.3) and she identifies fiction as a 'powerful tool for […] re-narrating ideas of Britishness' (p.4). In her consideration of the postcolonial literary marketplace, Ilott states that 'attention to the marketing of postcolonial literature also means focussing upon the outer packaging as well as

[70] Ralina L. Joseph, *Transcending Blackness: From the New Millennium Mulatta to the Exceptional Multiracial* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2013).
[71] Aspinall and Song, p.2.
[72] Peter J. Aspinall, 'Ethnic Options of 'Mixed Race' People in Britain: A Report for UK Census Agencies on Preferences for Terminology and Classifications', *ESRC Report* (2008), 1 – 39 (p.16).
[73] Ilott, p.3.

the inner workings of many of the novels in question' (p.96). It is this balance between the outer functions of the texts – the paratextual elements, construction of authorial persona and marketing and media coverage – and the inner workings of the novels that this thesis is interested in and provides the justification for its case study approach. Analysing the 'outer workings' of the novels – the ways in which the authors, and the novels, are marketed and framed - illustrates contemporary attitudes towards mixed race and the ways in which these discourses are circulated. Combining this with an analysis of the ways in which mixed race is presented within the novels themselves, allows space for a 'new mode of narration' regarding ideas about mixedness. In taking this approach, this thesis considers narration in both senses, as the way in which the story of mixed race is told through contemporary British authors and renegotiated through the narratives the authors make available.

The centrality of literature to the production, and renegotiation, of ideas about race and national identity has long been established, by critics such as Mark Stein and Chris Weedon. Similarly, the impact of media representation on popular opinions and attitudes towards race and national identity is well documented. In his analysis of race and the media, *Race and the Cultural Industries*, Anamik Saha argues that the 'discourse of 'diversity' in the media effectively 'makes race', that is, it constructs industry and public understandings of race'.[74] Saha argues that presentations of race within the media have a significant impact on public perceptions and attitudes towards non-white racial difference. Whilst critics have considered the social value and work of British literature, as well as the role of the media, in the construction of social ideas about, and attitudes towards race, to date they have been considered separately. Established studies such as Graham Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001), Sarah Brouillette's *Postcolonial Writers and the Global Literary Marketplace* (2007) and Claire Squires *Marketing Literature* (2007) consider the workings of the outer packaging

[74] Anamik Saha, *Race and the Cultural Industries* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), p.6.

of the texts. Studies such as Joe Moran's *Star Authors* (2000) and Loren Glass' *Authors Inc* (2004) consider the construction and function of the literary celebrity in contemporary society. From a literary studies perspective, studies like Richard Lane et al.'s *Contemporary British Fiction* (2003) and Nick Bentley's *Contemporary British Fiction* (2008), as well as numerous works within the field of Black British/British Asian literature – Sara Upstone's *British Asian Fiction* (2010), Claire Chambers' *British Muslim Fictions* (2011), Kadija Sesay's *Black British Literature* (2005) – have all considered the ways in which British fiction is contributing to the project of rewriting narratives of Britishness. Contributing to the fields of work established by these academics, this study combines a publishing studies approach with that of a critical literary perspective, interrogating the ways in which the postcolonial literary marketplace brands and markets authors of mixed race and the social effect of such branding strategies and narratives. Whilst there have been many crucial studies into the ways in which literature functions externally and internally, this thesis will mark the first point at which these two approaches are brought together for a sustained investigation into the ways in which literature functions as both object and agent.

Similarly, whilst many studies have considered the ways in which race is discussed and marketed within the literary marketplace and British fiction, this marks the first consideration of the ways in which mixed race functions specifically, and significantly, within contemporary and literary discourse. As is evident from the previous studies of mixed race discussed earlier, cultural figures and literature are integral to the discourses that circulate regarding mixed race. The mixed-race author is ideally placed in this sense, as a central figure through which these discourses can be mediated. Upstone argues that

> Contemporary British fiction, rather than merely reflecting norms, plays an important part in gesturing towards the possible future of a transformed social landscape […]

> playing an active part in mapping the role of race in contemporary British society, but also in vigorously engaging with debate as to what that future should – and could - look like.[75]

The position of literature as an expression and representation of Britishness, and the cultural authority bestowed upon writers of literary fiction, positions authors as powerful agents in society and culture. Whilst they have often become embroiled in the processes of 'marketing the margins' identified in Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic* and Emig's *Commodifying Postcolonialism*, they also have the agency with which to challenge the discourses race and mixedness that they find themselves embroiled in.[76]

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

Identifying Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* as the starting point of the emerging trend for mixed-race fiction at the start of the millennium, the first chapter of this thesis examines the ways in which mixed race was embroiled in the discourses of multiculturalism that circulated within this period. Published in 2000, Smith's novel emerged at what was arguably the height of multiculturalism as a political project within Britain and the resurgence of interest in mixed race, consolidated by the inclusion of mixed race as a census category in 2001. The first part of the chapter explores the ways in which Smith's racial identity functioned as a synecdoche for a version of Britain as a successful, meritocratic multiculture. Through an analysis of the articles and profiles that accompanied the novelist, and the novel, into the

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[75] Upstone, *Rethinking Race*, p.11.
[76] Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001); Rainer Emig and Oliver Lindner (eds.), *Commodifying (Post)Colonialism: Othering, Reification, Commodification and the New Literatures and Cultures in English* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010).

marketplace, this chapter analyses the ways in which those discourses were constructed, as well as the identifying the lingering hostility and racialisation underlying the proclamations of a post-racial Britain. The second part of the chapter moves to consider Smith's novel itself, both in relation to its presentation of mixed-race identity and its exploration of British multiculturalism. Reading against the popular impetus to consider the novel as an expression of a vibrant celebration of multiculturalism, this chapter reads the novel as a critique of multicultural politics and race relations in Britain's recent history.

Chapter two moves its focus to Hari Kunzru, whose 2002 debut *The Impressionist* was heavily anticipated in the aftermath of *White Teeth*, emerging into a literary marketplace primed for fiction about mixed-race protagonists and by mixed-race authors. In dialogue with theorists such as Robert Young and his conceptualisation of the mixed-race figure as a hybrid, disruptive force, this chapter explores the function of the mixed-race figure in Kunzru's debut. Widening its scope to 2017, this chapter extends its focus to Kunzru's latest novel, *White Tears*, and its examination of ideas about racial authenticity, cultural appropriation and cultural miscegenation. The final section of the chapter takes within its scope Kunzru's persona, to consider the ways in which mixed race is configured in relation to Kunzru's British Asian heritage and the early millennium boom of 'Asian Cool'.

Monica Ali, and her 2003 novel *Brick Lane*, are the focus of chapter three, which considers the ways in which Ali's mixed race became a focal marketing feature for the novel and embroiled in the ensuing scandal about cultural appropriation and authenticity, assessing the extent to which mixedness was configured as a site of racial inauthenticity. This chapter examines the ways in which the success of Ali's debut novel, and the work which followed, was contingent upon her racial identity and taking race as a subject matter. With reference to Gerard Genette's articulation of the function of a novel's paratexts, this chapter analyses the process of the novel coming to the marketplace – from the pre-publication hype surrounding

the novel in 2003 to the adaptation of the novel in 2006 – examining each step of the journey to the marketplace to assess the importance of race to the novel's marketing and the construction of Ali's own, increasingly contentious, mixed-race identity.

Chapter four considers Diana Evans debut novel *26a* (2005), pinpointing the time of its publication as the start of a decline in interest in mixed-race fiction. As attitudes towards New Labour's policy of multiculturalism deteriorated amidst condemnations of the project as a failed experiment, so too did the interest and popular reception of novels of this oeuvre. Despite having a very similar profile to that of Zadie Smith and receiving critical acclaim for her debut novel, Evans has yet to receive the same level of popular success or attention. This chapter will examine why Evans, and her novels, have been 'swept under' the wave of mixed race/multicultural fiction, rather than 'riding the crest of the wave'.[77] This chapter also investigates the ways in which mixedness has often been racialised as black, within the media and the field of literary study, examining the consequences of considering mixedness in monoracial terms. The latter section of the chapter moves to consider Evans' novel *26a* and her most recent work *Ordinary People* (2018), to assess what sense of mixedness and racial counter narratives the novels make available. Caballero and Aspinall state that there is a need to reconsider mixed race outside of the notion of the 'extraordinary' and begin to consider it within the notion of the 'everyday'; I argue that Evans' work provides an opportunity to consider mixed race as ordinary and 'everyday'.[78]

The final chapter returns to Zadie Smith and brings the analysis of mixed-race discourse full circle and up to the contemporary moment by considering the ways in which Smith's cultural profile and representation of mixed race has evolved since the start of the millennium. By far the most successful of all the authors this thesis considers, and the

[77] Danielle Fuller, 'The Crest of the Wave: Reading the Success Story of Bestsellers', *SCL/ELC*, 33:2 (2008), 40 – 59 (p.39).
[78] Caballero and Aspinall, p.7.

benchmark against which they have all been measured, since the publication of *White Teeth* in 2000 Smith has become an internationally recognised cultural figure and authority, called upon to comment on issues ranging from Brexit to whether make up is a feminist issue. The first section of this chapter contrasts her presentation of mixed race in 2000 with the sense of mixedness offered through 2016's *Swing Time* and her 2018 book of essays *Feel Free.* The latter section examines the media profiles and reviews that circulated during the promotion for Smith's later work, to examine whether the discourse surrounding Smith's racial identity has shifted the intervening years.

The breadth of this research, combined with a detailed case study analysis of the different contexts in which interest in mixed-race fiction has emerged and been received, aims to identify and examine the shifting meanings attached to mixed race across the last two decades. The figure of the mixed-race author has formed a significant locus through which ideas about mixedness, and race more widely, have been constructed. As this thesis argues, these authors play a crucial role in creating a space to challenge, and re-envision, notions of race and mixedness.

1. MIXED-RACE MULTICULTURALISM: ZADIE SMITH

White Teeth was published in 2000 at what was arguably the height of Britain's politics of multiculturalism. New Labour's victory in 1997 was premised on the idea of 're-branding Britain' as 'Cool Britannia', an imagined space of diversity and opportunity in which difference was celebrated.[1] This chapter argues that Zadie Smith was co-opted into this project of re-envisioning Britain as a space where difference was 'cool' and celebrated, her mixed-race identity central to this representation. Smith's authorial persona was co-opted into the project of shifting the dialogue surrounding multiculturalism from negative associations with difference into positive attitudes towards diversity. Smith's appeal was such that critics commented that 'one gets the feeling that had Zadie Smith not come along, certain sections of the media – broadsheet rather than tabloid, for once - would have been forced to invent her'.[2]

The first section of this chapter considers the representation of Smith within the marketing and media materials surrounding the release of her debut novel, arguing that Smith was presented as the pinnacle of multicultural success. Multicultural politics reached their height around the start of the millennium, and this chapter analyses the narratives constructed around Zadie Smith, and her mixed-race identity, to explore the ways in which her public persona, and debut novel, were mobilised in narratives of multiculturalism at the start of the century. With a similar ethos to what I read as *White Teeth*'s historicising project in the latter section of this chapter, I argue we can use the presentation of Smith within the media as a way of historicising and critiquing multicultural politics of the time and examining

[1] Tariq Modood, *Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p.10.
[2] Sean O'Hagan, 'Zadie Bites Back', *The Guardian*, 25 August 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/aug/25/fiction.bookerprize2002> [accessed 28 January 2017].

conceptualisations of mixedness at the start of the millennium. The latter section of the chapter argues that through *White Teeth,* Smith is historicising and critiquing approaches to multiculturalism and race relations in Britain at the start of the millennium. Both sections explore the ways in which mixed race specifically is implicated in discourses of multiculturalism, establishing a discourse of mixed-race multiculturalism that was significant in 2000.

ZADIE SMITH: MULTICULTURAL ICON

Anne-Marie Frontier argues that the idea of multiculturalism was used to

> construct visions of 'the multicultural' […] something which is put to work, which is mobilised to produce desires, identities, anxieties […] in the reconfiguration of what connects inhabitants of the national space to one another, as well as to the nation itself.[3]

I argue that Smith's narrative and mixedness was implicated in discourses of multiculturalism in an attempt to reconfigure attitudes towards multiculturalism and race. Smith's appeal to these discourses of multiculturalism was noted in most reviews of the novel, which stressed her racial background, her cultural heritage as the daughter of a Jamaican immigrant, her youth and precocity and her elite Cambridge education.

[3] Anne-Marie Frontier, *Multicultural Horizons and the limits of the civil nation* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), p.3.

> She seems at times to have been the product of collective wish fulfilment by a British press which needed an attractive, young, black female literary starlet to fulfil some notion of a newly progressive multiracial Britain where race riots, the BNP and Stephen Lawrence murder were unfortunate aberrations.[4]

Smith's value to discourses of multiculturalism is apparent here, both as an emblem of the progress of race relations in the UK and as a vehicle for redirecting the tone of a discourse dominated by further limits on immigration (Immigration and Asylum Act 1999) and the racist murder of a young black man. Modood argues that

> the primary interest of multiculturalism is not in culture *per se* but in the political uses of non-European ethnic origin and related identities, especially in turning their negative and stigmatic status into a positive feature of the societies that they are now part of.[5]

The next section of this chapter will investigate the ways in which Smith's narrative was a conduit for this project of changing the narrative of multiculturalism and immigration from stigma to praise.

Modood's statement highlights the centrality of the media to this project, as well as the value of cultural figures in both constructing social discourses and communicating them to the wider public. The Parekh report, *The Future of Multi-ethnic Britain*, identifies that 'the media have an essential role to play in re-interpreting the mainstream, and in representing Britain as

[4] O'Hagan, 'Zadie Bites Back'.
[5] Modood, p.43.

a community of communities', as well as the role of the arts as a 'critical element' in the reinterpretation of the mainstream canon.[6] As evidenced by the racial mugging crisis of the 1970s, the media played a crucial part in galvanising public opinion in relation to race. Parekh specifically identifies the role of the author as a key component of the effort to 'recreate the national story', in part as a corrective to common assumptions about national identity that have contributed to enduring racial tensions and inequities within the UK; the idea that racial homogeneity existed pre-Windrush or that minority populations have an illegitimate claim to a British identity and resources (p.162). Revising these damaging and stagnant narratives surrounding Britain's immigrant and minority populations, in turn, theoretically creates space for Britain's non-white population to locate themselves and their histories within contemporary culture and 'enable[s] individuals to position their personal life-stories within the larger, more significant, national story' (p.16).

Whilst the narrative of *White Teeth* arguably works towards these aims, it was the narrative surrounding Smith herself that was most ardently seized upon and implicated in this work. Many of the reviews of the period start by introducing Smith as 'young, black and British',[7] as a 'precociously talented 24-year-old, mixed race, Cambridge graduate',[8] who is 'young, good looking, from a modest background and half black',[9] a key 'part of this entrepreneurial, multicultural Britain'.[10] There are very few reviews that bypass the

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[6] Bhikhu Parekh (Chair), *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (London: Runnymede Trust, 2000), pp.167, 162.
[7] Stephanie Merritt, 'She's young, black and British – and the first publishing sensation of the millennium', *The Guardian*, 16 January 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/jan/16/fiction.zadiesmith> [accessed 28 January 2017].
[8] O'Hagan, 'Zadie Bites Back'.
[9] Anne Chisholm, 'A new ethnic suburb for London', *The Telegraph*, 15 September 2002, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4728761/A-new-ethnic-suburb-for-London.html> [accessed 28 January 2017].
[10] Stephen Moss, 'White Teeth by Zadie Smith', *The Guardian*, 26 January 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/jan/26/fiction.zadiesmith> [accessed 28 January 2017].

opportunity to showcase Smith's multicultural selling points and even her British Council biography mentions her mixed race.[11] The repeated emphasis on Smith's background suggests that it is Smith herself who is being used to create this space within British cultural life for non-white narratives, offered as a reflection of, and role model for, Britain's ethnic population. Her background functions as a narrative of the success of multiculturalism, the descriptors used above forming a checklist of all the potential obstacles in the way of Smith's success. Youth, race, class and gender have all been overcome in this vision of Britain as a meritocratic multiculture, where success is no longer predicated on a white privileged background but on the strength of an individual's entrepreneurial drive. In this narrative Smith has equal access to opportunity, to an elite education and institutions eager to embrace her story. The repeated emphasis on her background coheres with the sense of desperation evident in the statement that had she not come along 'the media would have been forced to invent her'. Smith's biography functions as a reproach to critics of multiculturalism and as evidence of its incontrovertible success.

Smith's narrative also functions as a benchmark for Britain's minority population. Whilst the Parekh report identified that structural changes were needed in order for a true sense of multiculturalism to emerge, it also problematically stated that 'important changes are also needed within Asian and black communities themselves if they are to overcome the obstacles which they face and take full advantage of the opportunities offered by wider society'.[12] The sentiment of this statement is problematic as it reinforces damaging stereotypes of Britain's ethnic minority population as resistant and indolent, shifting the focus from addressing structural inequalities and placing the burden of overcoming these barriers onto Britain's minority population. This statement suggests that the barriers in the way of

[11] Dr Julie Ellam (2007) and Dr Guy Woodward (2013), 'Zadie Smith', *British Council*, <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/zadie-smith> [accessed 7 January 2019].
[12] The Parekh Report, p.x.

ethnic minority advancement were slowly falling away, placing the responsibility onto Britain's ethnic minorities to take advantage of this supposedly meritocratic economic environment. In this sense Smith was offered as an inspirational figure and an example to Britain's minority populations. Encouraging the ethnic minority population to be 'entrepreneurial' about their success completely negates the privilege of Smith's position, published as a direct result of the opportunities afforded to her, and the contacts made, during her time at Cambridge. Instead, her narrative functions as 'the closest thing that Britain had to the American 'rags-to-riches' immigrant dream', presenting Britain as a space of opportunity for minority populations.[13] Modood's critique of multiculturalism is apt here, as he argues that

> No minority can be a model for all others. We may welcome the interactions that produce cultural hybridity in, for example, the music, dance, videos, TV and entertainment enclaves that characterise certain parts of Los Angeles, New York or London and think they are attractive forms of multiculturalism, but we have no right to insist that they be *the* form of multiculturalism that other groups should adapt themselves too.[14]

Smith's story was not only utilised as a way of re-directing the narrative of British national identity and multiculturalism, but also as a way of presenting Smith to a 'presumed […] mono-cultural, White' English reader through terms it could recognise.[15] The emphasis placed on her working class, 'modest' background and her elite Cambridge education works

[13] Arun Kundnani, *The End of Tolerance: Racism in 21st Century Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), p.52.
[14] Modood, p.46.
[15] Kean, p.14.

as a means of familiarising her through traditionally established symbols of Britishness.[16] The state project of 'developing' a national identity was deemed necessary to 'bind the nation together […] and show how a set of core values were embedded in what it meant to be British whilst new symbols were needed with which the state could celebrate Britishness defined in this way'.[17] Zadie Smith's narrative provided a symbiosis of the old and the new symbols of Britishness literally in terms of her parentage – a fusion of an 'older' notion of Britishness (white) with a 'newer' version (black) – as well as encompassing established markers of Britishness through the association with Kings College, Cambridge. She was presented as a representative of a 'newly diverse' Britain, whilst recognisably reminiscent of a more traditional iteration of Britishness, rendering the more unstable, racialised aspects of her narrative secure within recognisable, knowable boundaries.

Building on James Graham's argument, Michael Perfect argues that this era of multiculturalism at the turn of the century was defined by a 'new 'crisis of knowable communities' [that] has emerged in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries'.[18] Perfect argues that this social climate contributed to the success of novels such as *White Teeth*, *Brick Lane* and *Small Island*, which he reads as texts which '[attempt] to make Britain's ethnic minorities 'knowable' to the (predominantly white) literary mainstream' (ibid). *White Teeth* was proclaimed a 'landmark for multicultural Britain',[19] with Smith hailed as the 'voice of a new England',[20] speaking to the idea of Smith as a spokesperson for the ethnic communities of Britain, revealing their family dynamics, traditions and cultures to

[16] Chisholm, 'A new ethnic suburb for London'.
[17] Kundnani, p.122.
[18] Perfect, *Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism*, p.141.
[19] 'Whitbread book award shortlist: first novel', *The Guardian*, 15 November 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/nov/15/3> [accessed 30 January 2017].
[20] Jennifer Hodgson, 'Interview with Zadie Smith', *The White Review*, 15 December 2015, <http://www.thewhitereview.org/interviews/interview-with-zadie-smith/> [accessed 30 January 2017].

an eager and curious white audience. The emphasis placed on Smith's background and her parental heritage work in a similar way by taking Smith, as a member of the purportedly 'new', emergent mixed-race population of Britain and making her knowable to her audience. The propensity to read *White Teeth*'s narrative as a 'vibrant portrait of contemporary London',[21] and the use of Smith's biography as representative of a multicultural generation, function as '"stabilizing" methods, which the mainstream applies to minority cultural production, a part of today's "management techniques"'.[22] Again, a sense of managing the 'other' through construction of a specific narrative is prominent here; the need to break down Smith's racial background and explain that she is 'half-Jamaican on her mother's side' suggests the need to definitively know where she is from.[23] The emphasis placed on her meritocratic rise provide the audience with a 'non-white character that [is] easy to sympathise with' and 'cheer for'.[24] The iteration of her Britishness through traditional symbols such as Cambridge show that she is 'just like us', a figure of Britishness that, whilst different, is still familiar and, as such, poses little threat to the idea of what the nation is (ibid).

On the occasions that Smith spoke against the notion of herself as a spokeswoman for Britain's ethnic population, or against the tendency to use the world of *White Teeth* to proclaim multiculturalism managed, she was treated with tangible hostility.

> In the last eight months Smith, the daughter of a Jamaican mother and English father, who set her novel in Willesden where she still lives, has developed a combative

[21] Ellam and Woodward, 'Zadie Smith'.
[22] Katarzyna Jakubiak, 'Simulated Optimism: The International Marketing of White Teeth', in *Zadie Smith: Critical Essays* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008) ed.by, Tracey L. Walters, 201 - 218 (p.210).
[23] Ellam and Woodward, 'Zadie Smith'.
[24] Perfect, *Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism,* p.201.

> public persona, pronouncing on everything from immigration policy to the shortage of proper fiction.[25]

Smith's attempts to move away from her multicultural branding and speak against the presentation of herself, and her novel, as the epitome of the multicultural dream were treated as hostile gestures. Her discussion of topics such as 'immigration' and 'proper fiction' were treated as egotistical and she was presented as someone who had experienced mild success and, only 'eight months' later, was having ideas above her station and overstepping the boundaries as to what was within her remit to comment upon. There is a sense here that the topics she has chosen to comment on either disrupt the narrative of a positive, successful multiculture (immigration) or are elite and established topics ('proper fiction') that she is unqualified to comment upon, bound up in the suggestion that because she is a woman, mixed race, too young or too early in her career these are outside the parameters of her understanding or authority. It is clear in this response that what was required for the purpose of this narrative of multiculturalism was a spokeswoman, rather than a woman who actually spoke to the condition of England.

Whilst Smith's image was central to the idea of demystifying Britain's ethnic population and re-mediating it through familiar symbols of national identity, it was also integral to the project of selling multiculturalism to a sceptical population. Modood suggests that one of the most important roles of multiculturalism was in redirecting national identity and 'the story a country tells about itself, to itself'.[26] This is important in relation to the ways in which those resistant to the changes in Britain's racial demographics utilised myths of a

[25] 'In Brief: White Teeth', *The Guardian*, 15 September 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/sep/15/guardianfirstbookaward2000.guardianfirstbookaward> [accessed 30 January 2017].
[26] Modood, p.18.

'glorious', mono-racial British past to contest increasing diversity. *White Teeth*, as object and text, functioned in similar ways, enabling Smith's presumed white, middle class target audience to display their own liberalism, a form of racialised cultural capital. Smith's novel, on display in bookcases, 'on academic syllabi' and 'book-club reading lists', functioned as a statement of progressive values, an embrace of diversity, at both an individual and national level.[27] Paul Gilroy characterises this idea of multiculturalism as a self-serving mechanism of congratulating oneself – as an individual and a nation – arguing that in 'official multiculturalism […] all parties […] have come to share an interest in magnifying racial, cultural and ethnic differences so that a special transgressive pleasure can be discovered in their spectacular overcoming'.[28] The era of *White Teeth* constituted such a moment, an exaggeration of difference which in turn provided an opportunity to applaud oneself in overcoming it, for both the nation on a large media stage and the individual in their book groups and via their bookshelves.

Smith speaks to the over emphasis on her ethnic background, and that of her characters, in an interview with *Interview* magazine. In response to a question regarding the racial identities of her characters, Smith responded:

> My life looks like that. My life is black and white and mixed. My mother's a Rastafarian, my dad was a short white guy—it's not an affectation. It's also the lives of millions of people throughout the world. But there is this pocket of people who read books, who struggle to name a black friend, so to them it's unusual or exotic in some sense. But to me, it's not.[29]

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[27] Perfect, *Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism,* p.6.
[28] Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.xxii.
[29] Christopher Bollen, 'Zadie Smith', *Interview Magazine*, 14 November 2013, <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/zadie-smith/print/> [accessed 30 January 2017].

For Smith herself, and the non-white population in the novel, cultural diversity is an everyday part of British life that is neither unusual or exotic, a sense of a 'convivial culture' where multiculturalism is 'an ordinary feature of social life' rather than something that requires comment or celebration.[30] She draws attention to the division between experiences of life in Britain's ethnic minorities versus the white population, for whom race, culture and diversity is an 'affectation'. Smith's response highlights one of the key issues with public multicultural discourse, that it was constructed with the white population of Britain in mind. The emphasis on cultural diversity as an entertaining addition to British cultural life and the repetition of Smith's council-estate-to-Cambridge success story are used to provide those in the 'pockets' of England with access to an 'exotic' new culture. Ben Pitcher argues that 'to align oneself with racial difference becomes a powerful way of signalling one's own difference' and, in this sense, Smith's novel allows those outside of multicultural centres like London to mark themselves as liberal, keen participants in a multiculture, even when their reality suggests otherwise.[31] Smith's interpolation of 'black and white and mixed' also locates the perpetuation of racialised distinctions and boundaries within the white majority population; for her, racial diversity is inherent and insignificant in its everyday-ness, yet it remains a preoccupation within responses to the novel and the discussion surrounding her authorial persona.

One of the ways in which multiculturalism, and mixedness more generally, was sold to the wider British public was as an invigoration of energy, of 'freshness', into an 'old England' that was 'stale, scared' and 'unchanging',[32] where 'globalisation, the end of empire

[30] Upstone, *Rethinking Race*, p.23.
[31] Ben Pitcher, *Consuming Race* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), p.12.
[32] O'Hagan, 'Zadie Bites Back'.

and Britain's long-term decline as a world power' had resulted in stagnation.[33] Kundnani argues that in this context of decline and stagnation non-white culture was presented as a live, vibrant lifeline.

> In popular culture, black culture stepped into the mainstream of British life, albeit in a form that blunted its most radical edges. A glitzy image of 'Asian cool' was promoted in music, fashion, films and comedy […] It was all this that was summed up when non-white communities were described as 'vibrant' and when 'diversity was described as something new and exciting for Britain.[34]

Non-white culture was viewed as a way of halting British cultural decline, acting as an intervention, 'stepping' in to save it from stagnation. The language of multiculture that Kundnani identifies – newness, excitement, vibrancy - is repeatedly used to characterise the society of *White Teeth* and describe the voice of its creator, as well as the growing mixed-race population. Reviewers refer to the world of *White Teeth* as 'vibrant', 'fresh', full of 'zest'[35] and to Zadie Smith as the 'voice of a new England'.[36] One reviewer, in a piece entitled 'The New England', even goes as far as saying that the novel 'chronicles two families who bring patchwork of cultures to London of the 21st century'.[37] The language used to describe the novel in these reviews reflects the view of multiculturalism proposed by Kundnani as something new and exciting, a much needed injection of cool into 'British

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[33] The Parekh Report, p.xv.
[34] Kundnani, p.52.
[35] 'In a strange land', *The Guardian*, 22 January 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/jan/22/fiction.zadiesmith> [accessed 30 January 2017].
[36] Hodgson, 'Interview with Zadie Smith'.
[37] Anthony Quinn, 'The New England', *The New York Times*, 30 April 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/04/30/reviews/000430.30quinnt.html> [accessed 30 January 2017].

culture'. The suggestion that Smith is chronicling something that was 'brought' to Britain in the twenty-first century works in opposition to what Smith is doing in the novel itself, highlighting the long relationship between Britain and its colonial, migrant population. Parekh identifies that in order to move towards a more inclusive nation, 'dominant stories in Britain need to be changed' and that myths, like the one which suggests 'that until recently Britain was culturally homogenous', need to be addressed.[38] In this sense, Smith is contributing to the multicultural project as outlined by Parekh, an effort which is undermined by the media emphasis on her own 'newness' and the 'new England' she represents. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, this sense of 'newness' has also historically been attached to the mixed-race population of Britain, despite the long history of intermixing throughout British history that can be traced back to the sixteenth century.

Kundnani's statement also identifies a worrying attitude that was reflected through this approach to multiculturalism, as the dynamic presented here is one in which the minority culture is valued, and used, for what it can provide for the majority. In this scenario two aims are achieved; mainstream British culture – and its literary canon – are revitalised and the 'radical' aspects of black culture - the black power of the 60s, the anger of the race riots of the 80s – are dulled. In this respect, multicultural politics and its language of vibrancy and freshness, its adoption of non-white culture, functions as a management strategy, as a means of placation and control. Reading *White Teeth* within this framework, blunts and suppresses its critique of multicultural approaches to diversity and attitudes towards race in Britain, becoming 'something to be 'celebrated' rather than acted on'.[39] Each time *White Teeth* is read as a celebration of a working multiculture, critics and audiences are ignoring all the ways in which the novel illustrates a persistent racial divide within Britain and the ways in which

[38] The Parekh Report, p.103.
[39] Kundnani, p.44.

Smith's own commentary on the novel encourages the reader to view the world of *White Teeth* as ordinary and everyday - as it was for her - rather than emphasising its extraordinariness. Each time that Zadie Smith is presented as the start of a wave of new ethnic voices of Britain, the slow progress towards greater representation within the publishing industry is ignored. The ways in which the novel, and Smith herself, represent a challenge to the dominant representations of multiculturalism and Britain's non-white population, are rendered passive within a narrative of newness and celebration.

Whilst Pitcher has argued that the essence of multiculturalism is the acceptance of the fact that 'cultural difference is here to stay' and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of 'a 'return' to socially homogeneous societies that existed 'before' cultural difference', references to black and Asian culture as 'cool' suggests a temporal ephemerality that belies this fact.[40] Referring to Smith as 'new' and treating her mixed race as a recent, 'fashionable',[41] trend undermines this effort to entrench Britain's minority population within the dominant narrative of history and national story, suggesting that this is phase of British history, temporal in the way that 'coolness' is finite and time specific. There is also a sense of insubstantiality in viewing minority culture as 'cool', as something that is superficial and lacks roots, in opposition to the supposed rootedness and solidity of British culture and identity. Rather than making a space within British society and its social imaginary for minority cultures to exist, representing minority cultures as cool both exoticises, and trivialises, them.

This sense of newness and arrival, of Smith's success as the advent of a period of increased opportunity and recognition for ethnic minorities, was fleeting. Rather than creating a space for others to follow, the liberal use of Smith's biography seemed to further restrict the

[40] Ben Pitcher, *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.2.
[41] Chisholm, 'A new ethnic suburb for London'.

prerequisites for success. Kundnani argues that the consequence of the narrative of diversity 'as something new and exciting for Britain' is that

> The majority of young Asians and African-Caribbeans were excluded from this trendy coterie. For them, the public acceptability of a small number of high-profile faces only compounded their own sense of alienation. For them, multicultural Britain continued to be marred by a deep-seated racism, which not only excluded at every turn but also threatened them with violence on the streets.[42]

The phenomenal success of *White Teeth* and its consistent coverage for the early years of the millennium - hardback issue released in January 2000, paperback issue released in January 2001 and TV adaptation in September 2002 - dominated that particular period of time so heavily that it almost distracted from the lack of successors, authors from non-white backgrounds, emerging from this new era of supposed multicultural opportunity. Smith herself has noted that 'by the time *White Teeth* was published and I looked behind to see if the kids were coming up behind me it was already mostly finished'.[43]

Smith's rise did not lead to a succession of texts about different cultures being published, or advent an increasingly diverse publishing culture. Instead it led to the establishment of a very specific model of, and route to, ethnic opportunity. The authors that came closest to repeating Smith's success were Hari Kunzru (*The Impressionist*, 2002), Monica Ali (*Brick Lane*, 2003), Andrea Levy (*Small Island*, 2004), Diana Evans (*26a*, 2005) and Gautam Malkani (*Londonstani*, 2006), authors that are often referred to as key texts in the multicultural canon of English literature.[44] Whilst none of these authors or texts achieved

[42] Kundnani, p.52.
[43] Hodgson, 'Interview with Zadie Smith'.
[44] Perfect, *Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism.*

the same heights and reach of *White Teeth*, they do provide an interesting comparison with Smith as they all share similar backgrounds: almost all of the authors listed are from mixed-race backgrounds and were educated at either Oxford or Cambridge. The consistency of this profile suggests that success during this period of multicultural politics was subject to a specific set of requirements that still excluded the majority of the minority population of Britain and remained implicated in discourses of colour and class. Rather than signalling a sea change in attitudes to race, as discourses of multiculturalism were eager to suggest, this selection of authors acts as further confirmation of the 'deep-seated racism' and classism that continues to exclude and alienate minority communities in Britain.[45]

If we are to think of these authors within a canon of 'contemporary fiction about multiculturalism in London', as Michael Perfect argues we should in his book *Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism,* then it is necessary to consider the ways in which mixed race became embroiled in discourses of multiculturalism.[46] Despite four out of the seven authors featured in his book being of mixed race, little space is given to a discussion of the role that mixed race plays in the success of the novelists, its use within a multicultural framework, or how often slippage between the terms 'multicultural' and 'multiracial' occur, particularly in reference to Zadie Smith. In reviews she is referred to as 'multiracial',[47] as a member of the 'multicultural generation'[48] within the 'multi-racial pot of North London'[49]. On occasion both of these terms are waived in favour of the more explicit 'half black'.[50] The interchangeability of these terms signifies that there is something inherent within the idea of mixed race that

[45] Kundnani, p.52.
[46] Perfect, *Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism,* p.6.
[47] O'Hagan, 'Zadie Bites Back'.
[48] Moss, 'White Teeth by Zadie Smith'.
[49] John Ezard, 'Double first for novel newcomer Zadie Smith', *The Guardian*, 4 January 2001, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2001/jan/04/books.whitbreadbookawards2000> [accessed 30 January 2017]
[50] Chisholm, 'A new ethnic suburb for London'

expresses attitudes towards racial diversity that multiculturalism is trying to foster. A sense of intimacy in which racial and cultural boundaries are accepted and transgressed in ordinary ways, tapping into a version of multiculturalism that is not about 'deferring to difference but arises from the entangled *experience* of difference, of diversity, in real time'.[51] Valluvan expands on this idea and states that this is 'best realised if it simply reflects the enviable ability of ordinary inhabitants of urban multiculture, in the course of discovering each other through and across difference' (p.92). In this sense mixed-race children become an emblem of multiculture, of different cultures and races entangling and overcoming the barriers to social cohesion. Here again, there is also the implication that mixedness blunts some of the 'dangers' that blackness poses, the sense of being tied more deeply into British identity through the link of a white parent, of being more recognisably British. Sika Dagbovie argues that the emphasis placed on mixed race in societal discourse is not about embracing multi-raciality or creating a space for the articulation of a mixed-race identity, but an attempt to 'de-politicize identity'.[52] She refers to the functioning of the mixed-race star as a 'desired "other": multiracial, de-politicized, and lacking any serious racial allegiance' (p.225), arguing that mixed race is consumed differently, as 'a more palatable form of blackness'.[53]

Whilst critics of multiculturalism have highlighted its emphasis on the distinction between cultures and the suggestion that they exist in isolation to each other, mixedness came to symbolise a tangible merging of cultures and communities. This idea of cultures merging is echoed in the 'melting pot' discourse that is common to both narratives of multiculturalism and reviews of the book. Smith's novel has been referred to as a 'melting pot' and a 'cross-

[51] Sivamohan Valluvan, 'The Status of Multiculturalism and the Retreat from Difference' in *The State of Race* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) ed. by Nisha Kapoor, Virinder S Kalra and James Rhodes, 72 – 95, (p.91).
[52] Sika Alaine Dagbovie, 'Star-Light, Star-Bright, Star Damn Near White: Mixed Race Superstars', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 40: 2 (April 2007), 217 - 237 (p.221).
[53] Dagbovie-Mullins, *Crossing B(l)ack,* p.11.

cultural stew',[54] as 'a picture of social fluidity' and a portrait of a 'city in which the terms black and white become less and less relevant as we gradually meld into different shades of brown'.[55] Present here again is the sense that mixed race 'shades of brown' represent a more progressive Britain, where race is decreasing in relevance and the barriers it used to erect between races and cultures are dissolving as a result of increasing levels of intimacy. The rhetoric of the melting pot framework suggests an ease with which these separate entities are broken down and 'gradually meld' into one, belying the very real tensions and barriers that retain their hold within British society. If discourses of multiculturalism are about the interaction of different cultures, Smith, as the product of a Jamaican immigrant and a white Englishman, functions as a literal embodiment of the ways in which cultures successfully mix, providing a narrative of racial harmony that belies enduring racial tensions.

The idea of mixed-race children functioning as symbol of intimacy, of racial barriers dissolving to create a generation with a firmer claim to a British identity, is reflected in the novel. Smith writes that 'cross-pollination produces more varied offspring that are better able to cope with a changed environment', echoing the notion that mixed-race people will be better equipped to adapt to the changing dynamics of British society in ways their culturally isolated, first-generation parents weren't able to, in a period of time where racial tensions were more overt.[56] Within these narratives mixed-race children succeed in uniting disparate races and identities, functioning as a metaphor for '*continued* connectedness in the future'.[57] Extending the melting pot framework as a metaphor for cultural and racial harmony, however, does also signify some of the underlying, simmering tensions below the surface.

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[54] Quinn, 'The new England'.
[55] Simon Hattenstone, 'White knuckle ride', *The Guardian*, 11 December 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/dec/11/fiction.whitbreadbookawards2000> [accessed 30 January 2017].
[56] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2000), p.309.
[57] Perfect, *Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism*, p.82.

Where there are reviews that refer to the novel as a 'melting pot', there are also reviews that praise Smith's depiction of the 'mongrel texture of metropolitan life'.[58] In this context 'mongrel', a word with deeply racialized overtones, speaks to the enduring tensions and prejudices within race relations and interracial unions in the UK. Whilst the language of this sentiment is outdated and out of place in most multicultural discourses, it is a reminder that these attitudes persist despite any progress that has been made.

Furthermore, it becomes apparent that as much as Smith is used to portray the increasing insignificance of racial boundaries, the racially coded ways in which she is described in interviews highlights the 'persistence of difference'[59] that Pitcher argues is the consequence of a multicultural discourse premised on the idea of a 'community of communities' that exist in isolation.[60] Just as often as Smith's mixedness and ethnic ambiguity is used as a metaphor for cultural harmony and social fluidity in social discourses, the 'media translate [her] multiethnicity and frame it as monoraciality'.[61] Profiles highlight Smith's love of 'hip hop', her 'turban' and her 'big trainers',[62] or describe how she 'struck a larger-than-life note with her humour, keen ear for street slang, her Afro hairstyle and "gangsta rap" expressions', references that both remind the reader of her racial difference and define her through it.[63] Whereas other critics, when referring to the language of the book, have praised Smith's 'verbal pyrotechnics'[64] or 'pitch-perfect'[65] dialogue, the use of the colloquial 'gangsta' in this instance is imbued with negatively racialised connotations.

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[58] Quinn, 'The new England'.
[59] Pitcher, *The Politics of Multiculturalism*, p.21.
[60] The Parekh Report, p.3.
[61] Dagbovie-Mullins, *Crossing B(l)ack*, p.111.
[62] Merritt, 'She's young, black and British'.
[63] Hugh Davies, 'Zadie in running for Whitbread', *The Telegraph*, 4 January 2001, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1313065/Zadie-in-running-for-Whitbread.html> [accessed 30 January 2017].
[64] Quinn, 'A new England'.
[65] Chisholm, 'A new ethnic suburb for London'.

Dagbovie argues that mixed-race stars bear the burden of 'idealistic expectations' in which their images are used as an 'emblem of racial harmony'.[66] When their images do not cohere with this vision, however, they are forced 'into familiar stereotypes that satisfy other expectations' (p.232), stereotypical articulations of otherness signalled by 'big trainers' and 'street slang'.

This racialisation is most apparent in a *Guardian* interview, bookended with references to Smith's afro; the introduction lamented the replacement of Smith's natural hair with straight extensions – 'she's all long straight hair and lip gloss, and looks like any number of drained All Saints waltzing around club land' – and the conclusion expressed relief that the 'makeover seems to be a passing phase' and that her 'afro's expanding underneath' the extensions.[67] This preoccupation with the state of Smith's hair highlights not only the persistence of difference that Pitcher identifies, but the centrality of them to Smith's appeal and the eagerness and anxiety with which they were consumed. Approached through Deborah Root's conception of the commodification of cultural difference, the exoticisation of Smith's persona and narrative is 'positioned so that it is unable to move out of the conceptual box in which it has been placed'.[68] Root argues that 'any attempt to perceive another culture based on the commodification and consumption of difference will fail' because 'understanding never really was the point' (p.xi). In this sense, the role of Smith's narrative and the construction of her stardom within the context of multiculturalism, is a means of addressing the very real shift in British demography in a way that romanticises it, rather than accepting its realities and shifting approaches to racial diversity accordingly. Whether using Smith's mixed race as an emblem of racial harmony, or racialising her within established discourses

[66] Dagbovie, 'Star-Light, Star-Bright', p.232.
[67] Hattenstone, 'White knuckle ride'.
[68] Deborah Root, *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1996), p.31.

of blackness, Smith's ethnicity is used in a way that both highlights and commodifies racial difference, without it ever truly becoming insignificant or absent, proof of Minelle Mahtani's argument that 'the impossibly burdened' mixed-race figure 'cannot conceivably do the work of utopia that we repeatedly impose upon her'.[69] Considering ideologies of mixed race within this context problematises the foundations of a multicultural discourse preoccupied with definition, fixed categories, cultural separation and national identity, all the things which the nature of mixedness calls into question. There are a myriad of ways in which to be mixed race that are not limited to two discrete cultures merging and they do not always 'meld' gently in the manner suggested. The potential for plurality means that there is still no clear consensus in the terms we use to define it and perhaps that is the real asset of the concept of mixed race to improving race relations in Britain, that as those potentialities continue to grow, alongside the growth rate of the mixed-race population itself, the ability to categorise and define in any meaningful way becomes increasingly obsolete.

White Teeth's Multicultural Critique

The epigraph to *White Teeth* reminds the reader, via *The Tempest*, that 'what's past is prologue'.[70] In the following section I argue that this quotation underscores the project of Smith's novel - tracing narratives of empire, immigration from the colonies and approaches to multiculturalism in a narrative that spans 1857 – 1999 - in order to historicise race relations in Britain, understand how we have arrived to the contemporary moment and belie the notion of racial and cultural diversity in Britain as something new. Kundnani, echoing Smith's epigraph, argues that in order to move race relations forward it is crucial for society

[69] Mahtani, p.6.
[70] Smith, *White Teeth*, epigraph.

to put ‘racism into history […] to consider how particular forms of racism come to exist and who profits from them’; doing so ‘sets the experiences of different groups of victims of racism against the common social structures that have excluded them’.[71] I argue that this is the social and cultural service *White Teeth* provides for its reader, a way of historicising the UK’s prejudice, exposing the ways in which it has insinuated itself institutionally, as well as identifying, and addressing, the failings of approaches to race and multiculturalism to date.

When *White Teeth* was released in 2000, in the midst of New Labour’s multicultural strategy and following the racially motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence, and the ensuing investigation into racial bias within the justice system, the novel was heralded as a realist celebration of a successful multiculturalism. Anne Chisholm, in her review for the *Sunday Telegraph*, remarked that

> One of the endearing qualities of her sharp-eyed but warm-hearted book is that it makes racism appear not only ugly and stupid but ludicrously out of date, like the politician referred to as 'E. Knock someone or other'.[72]

In opposition to Chisholm’s reading of the novel, I argue that what *White Teeth* offers to the reader is confirmation of racism’s tenacity and ability to mutate into new forms, rather than proof of its diminishing power. The novel provides the reader with a history of race relations from the late sixties to the early nineties and in doing highlights the ways in which overt racism was replaced by hostility, suspicion, essentialism, tokenism and exoticism in turn, all of which are implicated in the rhetoric of multiculturalism that Smith’s novel reveals as a façade.

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[71] Kundnani, p.10.
[72] Moss, ‘White Teeth by Zadie Smith’.

Multiculturalism is a divisive concept that has grown in prominence since the 1940s with the arrival of the SS Empire Windrush, symbolising the advent of mass immigration back 'home' from the colonies. Although many studies have shown that there have been settled minority populations within Britain since the Roman period, this period of mass immigration is often viewed as an irrevocable turning point for racial and cultural diversity within Britain. The arrival of the SS Windrush in 1948 catalysed a reconfiguration of the demographics of Britain and initiated debates about immigration, difference, race and national identity that would come to define the decades that followed. Since then, British politics and society have struggled to grapple with what it means to be a multicultural nation and how to renegotiate what it means to be British.

The need to openly engage with the public regarding immigration reached its peak with the Notting Hill and North Kensington riots in 1958, which have been attributed to 'anxieties felt by white Britons about 'coloured' immigration' and resulted in MPs calling for stricter immigration controls.[73] This anxiety was located in race dynamics: whilst the populations of the colonies had been instilled with a sense of their British identity regardless of their colour, this was never communicated to the white British population back home and, as such, those immigrating from outside the empire were seen as imposters, draining the resources of legitimate – white – British people. Members of the British public with whom this sentiment resonated, were then forced to live in close proximity with Britain's new non-white residents, with urban cities experiencing a greater influx of immigrants. Whilst this enforced proximity resulted in anxiety and anger for some of the population, it also increasingly resulted in interracial relationships. The idea that, for some, this proximity was not enforced but embraced contributed equally to the escalating tension. Yasmin Alibhai-

[73] Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *Who Do We Think We Are? Imagining the New Britain* (London: Allen Lane, 2000), p.61.

Brown argues that the race riots were 'partly triggered by the distaste felt by many white men […] that too many white women, it seemed, were too happy to be seen going with black men', the riots a manifestation of the condemnation and fear regarding the impact of continued non-white immigration on the demographics of British society (p.60).

White Teeth's narrative extends back as far as 1857 and explicitly speaks to the Empire, reminding the reader of the origins of immigration, that Britain's non-white population 'are here because [the British Empire was] there'.[74] Whilst the narrative's main focus is Britain from the 1970s until the end of the millennium, it takes within its scope Mangal Pande's attempt to start an Indian rebellion against the British occupation of India in 1857 and the conception of Hortense Bowden – the suggestion that it was the result of force, not choice - by Ambrosia Bowden and a white English captain in Jamaica in 1907. Both of these instances speak to the unwanted presence and physical invasion of the British in colonies such as India and Jamaica. Ambrosia's narrative in particular showcases the fallacy of the benevolent Great British Empire narrative, exposing the cruelty and destruction that so often defined the experience of empire for those in the colonies. These instances also illustrate the anger of those within the colonies, both in the attempted rebellion and in Hortense's hostility towards her father and his associates. In this way, these sub-plots attempt to disrupt the dominant narratives of Empire and immigration that made the docking of the Windrush, and the ensuing change to British demographics, difficult for some sections of Britain's white population.

What is particularly interesting about Smith's narrative, unlike that of revisionist literary fiction such as Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, is that it does not start with the arrival of the Windrush. Hortense and Samad's arrival in Britain is given little attention, a narrative fact rather than an event or epoch, and neither arrive until the early 1970s. Their arrivals seem

[74] Kundnani, p.22.

commonplace, ordinary and more poignant in the wake of increasing immigration legislation. The 1962 Immigration Act reversed the post-war, open door policy that had encouraged migration from the colonies to contribute to the effort to rebuild Britain after the Second World War. After 1962, only those born in the UK, or those who had a passport issued by the British government could immigrate to the UK, contributing to an increasingly nationalistic mood and a further delimitation of what it meant to be British. Narratives surrounding the Windrush present it as an extraordinary event, an epoch of social change that tends to overshadow the long relationship between Britain and its non-white, colonial subjects. By taking the novel back to the nineteenth century, Smith is illuminating this history, highlighting that Britain's colonial subjects were part of Britain long before they arrived, exposing the dangerous fallacy of the Empire that has created an environment in Britain that is hostile towards racial and cultural difference.

The most overt expression of this hostility was Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech in 1968, which is referenced at the beginning of the novel. Powell's speech extolled the dangers of continuing to allow large numbers of immigrants into Britain, a 'preventable evil' that could be halted and reversed by putting a stop to immigration and sending some of Britain's immigrant population 'back home'.[75] The attitudes that prevailed in the wake of this period are the catalyst behind Samad and Alsana's move out of 'East London with its NF gangs, to North London, north-west, where things were more…more…liberal'.[76] The reference is a brief aside, yet it functions as a reminder of the overt and aggressive racism of the 1960s and 1970s. Whilst this seems to suggest pockets of Britain that are more progressive, it becomes apparent that Willesden Green is not a progressive racial utopia but rather that its 'liberal' attitudes are a result of a lack of a racial majority.

[75] Chris Hannan, *What Shadows* (London: Nick Hearn Books, 2016), p.50.
[76] Smith, *White Teeth*, p.59.

> She was shrewd. She saw what this was. 'Liberal? Hosh-kosh nonsense!' No one was more liberal than anyone else anywhere anyway. It was only that here, in Willesden, there was just not enough of any one thing to gang up against any other thing and send it running to the cellars while windows were smashed.[77]

In this context, the multicultural utopia that critics such as Chisholm read within the novel, is not proof of a progression in attitudes but a result of a localised, enforced migration to areas without a white majority. Modood argues that Britain's version of multiculturalism is a 'restrictive' one, as Britain is 'a multicultural society not so much by the emergence of a political movement but by a more fundamental movement of peoples'.[78] In this sense, these multicultural pockets of London emerged in response to, and as attempts to flee from, white racism.

The climate of racial violence and tension evident in this time period mutates into something less overt, but no less hostile. The 1970s saw the rise of escalating tensions between black communities and the police over racially biased stop and search procedures and an increasingly nationalistic sentimentality that resulted in the election of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in 1979. Whilst tensions were moving away from being openly hostile towards Britain's minority communities, that same hostility was becoming dangerously bureaucratised and institutionalised. The rhetoric of Powell's speech or Peter Griffiths campaign slogan 'if you want a nigger neighbour, vote labour' was instead euphemistically replaced by an emphasis on nationalism.[79] This sense of couching racist attitudes within ostensibly tolerant expressions is something Smith explores within this time

[77] Smith, *White Teeth*, p.63.
[78] Modood, p.2.
[79] Alibhai-Brown, *Who Do We Think We Are*, p.66.

period of the novel. Unable to find cigars with which to celebrate his impending fatherhood, Archie brings a box of Indian sweets into the office to share with colleagues. As an unknown quantity, however, the sweets are treated with 'suspicion'[80] and the other members of Archie's workplace are 'sceptical' (p.69) of their 'unwelcoming odour' (p.67). Archie's news receives an equal lack of enthusiasm;

> Archie shook his head wonderingly. 'I know! Her and me have a child, the genes mix up and blue eyes! Miracle of nature!'
>
> 'Oh yes, miracle,' said Maureen tersely, thinking that was a polite word for what it was (p.69).

These instances act as a reflection of attitudes towards the non-white population that are still 'terse' and hostile, even if they are expressed in more 'polite' ways. Archie's embrace of the Indian sweets, his excitement at the idea of a 'mixed' child and the fact of Clara's race as something he 'hadn't even thought […] worth mentioning' are read as strange naivety in a cultural climate where the idea of interracial marriage still causes the majority of the population - reflected in the microcosm of the MorganHero offices - to '[choke] on [their] prawn cocktail' (p.69). In his meeting with his boss, Kelvin Hero, this antagonism is more explicit as Kelvin rescinds Archie's invitation to the annual company party because of the 'unpleasantness' of his interracial marriage;

> '…as I say, it's not that I'm a racialist Archie…'
>
> 'A racialist…'

[80] Smith, p.67.

> ‘I’d spit on that Enoch Powell…but then again he does have a point doesn’t he? There comes a point, a saturation point, and people begin to feel a bit uncomfortable’ (p.72).

This scene takes place in 1974, six years after Powell’s speech and it becomes apparent that whilst Archie’s boss is keen to distance himself from its blatant rhetoric of racism and hatred, the underlying attitudes of hostility and discomfort towards non-white immigration remain the same. Through this exchange Smith is showcasing that the post-Powell years do not necessarily represent a change in attitudes or a step towards a more multicultural and inclusive outlook as Chisholm suggests, but rather a shift in the ways that racism is expressed.

The narrative then moves to the 1980s where older forms of racism are reflected in the views of old age pensioner Mr Hamilton and his talk of ‘wogs’ (p.172) and ‘niggers’ (p.171). The exchange between Mr Hamilton and Irie, Millat and Magid is their first experience of overt racism, of their ‘othering’, in the novel. Mr Hamilton’s casual use of racist terms, and his refusal to accept that their fathers fought in the Second World War on behalf of Britain, catalyses a traumatic awakening to their own racial difference.

> ‘My dad was in the war. He played for England,’ piped up Millat, red-faced and furious.
>
> ‘Well, boy, do you mean the football team or the army?’
>
> ‘The British army. He drove a tank. A Mr Churchill. With her Dad,’ explained Magid.
>
> ‘I’m afraid you must be mistaken,’ said Mr Hamilton, genteel as ever. ‘There were certainly no wogs as I remember… (p.172).

Parekh identified that one of the key requirements for a successful multiculturalism is to re-think the narrative of national identity, yet in this instance it becomes apparent that there is a deep-seated resistance to accepting that Britain's non-white population has a legitimate claim to British nationality and recognition within British history. Parekh defines this period following the Second World War as one in which 'Britain's sense of itself as a world power' was deteriorating, suffering not only from a decline in global status but also from an increasing sense of 'dislocation'[81] of national identity and what it is to be British. The loss of the empire and the influx of post war immigration destabilised notions of British power and identity, affecting Britain's relationship with 'territorial, political and cultural space' (p.2), which in turn defined its attitudes towards its non-white population. Instead of catalysing a re-evaluation of ideas of national identity, this context of decline prompted a stronger hold on existing notions of Britishness and attempts to further demarcate its boundaries; a desperate grasp on the idea of roots as being 'the ropes one throws out to rescue drowning men'.[82] This concept of a return to traditional notions of (white) British national identity, and a tightening of its boundaries as a lifeline for a country that was losing its sense of self, was a key aspect of Thatcher's government during this period.

In this context, the uglier incarnations of prejudice seem to belong to Mr Hamilton's older generation, out of sync with the first wave of multicultural politics reflected in approaches to cultural diversity adopted by the children's primary school teacher Poppy Burt-Jones, who is 'really interested in Indian culture' and its '*really exciting*', 'colourful' festivals.[83] Through the characterisation of Burt-Jones, Smith is critiquing the idea of multiculturalism as 'inclusion by virtue of othering'.[84] When she realises that Samad is from

[81] The Parekh Report, p.2.
[82] Smith, *White Teeth*, p.193.
[83] Smith, *White Teeth*, p.133 (original emphasis).
[84] Pitcher, *The Politics of Multiculturalism*, p.34.

Bangladesh rather than India, she expresses 'surprise' and 'disappointment', but reconciles this assumption as 'the same sort of ball-park'.[85] The consequence of this multicultural approach is the ensuing essentialising discourses, emphasised as their conversation draws to a close and Poppy makes the exact same elision again by expressing surprise that Magid and Millat are not typical 'Indian children', as they are 'loud' and not 'subdued' (p.134). Through this interaction Smith illustrates how easily this attitude towards difference becomes tokenistic. Even when supplied with accurate information about Samad's nationality, moments later the same mistake is made again. Poppy, as a representative of a liberal, white middle class, is more interested in stereotypical ideas of difference, rather than the actual history and reality of Britain's minority populations.

The school setting was a key space in which discourses of multiculturalism were developed and communicated in an attempt to rectify damage inflicted to Britain's non-white population throughout the proceeding decades. Kundnani identifies this policy as a 'mode of control rather than a line of defence', a means of controlling diversity rather than insulating Britain's ethnic minorities from racism or enforced assimilation.[86] Instead of fostering a spirit of inclusivity or understanding in the new generation, this approach to multicultural policy often functioned instead as a means of de-politicising minority cultures and as a placatory gesture towards addressing the complaints raised through the race riots of the 1980s. By addressing diversity in 'council chambers, classrooms and on television [it] could be institutionalised, managed and commodified' (p.44). Kundnani argues that

> what was taught was a hackneyed formulae of steel bands, samosas and saris, a desiccated view of ethnic identity in which different cultures were static and closed

[85] Smith, *White Teeth*, p.133.
[86] Kundnani, p.44.

> […] In these ways genuine education about other people, their histories and struggles, was replaced with the grim essentialism of identity politics (p.46).

Smith's critique of this approach is direct. Poppy Burt Jones leads the school orchestra in playing ill-defined 'Indian music' that neither she, nor the class as a result, understand to be anything deeper than 'the strains to be found at the beginning of a Hindi musical, or in the back-room of an 'Indian' restaurant'.[87] Instead of this functioning as an opportunity to encourage the children to challenge stereotypes and assumptions, to meaningfully engage with cultures outside of their own, what they learn from this exchange is that cultures exist in separation to each other, defined against 'English' culture.

> 'I don't think it is very nice to make fun of *somebody else's culture*.'
> The orchestra, unaware that this is what they had been doing, but aware that this was the most heinous crime in the Manor School rule book, looked to their collective feet.
> 'Do *you*? Do *you*? How would *you* like it, Sophie, if someone made fun of Queen?' (p.155).

This exchange reflects a politically correct approach to multiculturalism, where children learn that it is wrong to disrespect other cultures yet are never taught how to recognise the multitude of subtle ways they may be doing so. Reni Eddo-Lodge argues that 'at best, white people have been taught not to mention that people of colour are "different" in case it offends'.[88] The shame and embarrassment attached to Burt-Jones' rebuke acts a barrier

[87] Smith, *White Teeth*, p.154.
[88] Reni Eddo-Lodge, 'Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race', *The Guardian*, 30 May 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/30/why-im-no-longer-talking-to-white-people-about-race> [accessed 12 January 2019].

towards further discussion or exploration of other cultures, as curiosity becomes inextricably tied to the fear of causing offense. Burt-Jones' response functions as an example of a mode of political correctness that 'characterizes the (contingent) totality of positions that social actors are able to take within the bounds of social acceptability'.[89] In this instance, the token adoption of multiculturalism shuts down the possibility of meaningful conversations about cultural difference by setting the boundaries as either an unquestionable, immediate embrace or silence, the consequences of which are a model of political correctness that results in a tokenistic understanding at best. As Modood problematised, this approach to multiculturalism speaks of, and foregrounds, ''difference' rather than 'culture''.[90]

Here, Smith also interrogates the idea that England exists as a monoculture with 'bounded, nameable, individually homogenous and unmeltable minority uni-cultures which are pinned onto [its] backdrop' (p.89), by drawing attention to the fallacy of a national culture defined by a 'very light-skin Persian called Farookh'.[91] The use of Queen as an emblem of British culture, a band whose lead singer was born in a former British colony to Indian parents, emphasises the fallacy of an essential British national culture that is 'pure' or separate from other cultural influences, in the way that Burt-Jones and this approach towards multiculturalism suggests. In contrast, Millat's responses to Burt-Jones' request to name his favourite musician suggest 'a model of race in which each individual is multicultural due to the cultural influences […] that are at play in contemporary Britain'.[92] His answers – Bruce Springsteen and Michael Jackson – gesture towards an emerging model of British culture largely defined by global references to American culture that cross racial boundaries and, for second generation immigrants, are a more significant cultural influence than the culture of

[89] Pitcher, *The Politics of Multiculturalism*, p.3.
[90] Modood, p.39.
[91] Smith, *White Teeth*, p.155.
[92] Nick Bentley, *Contemporary British Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2008), p.53.

their parents. His answer, however, 'did not seem to be the right one' and Burt-Jones rejects the idea that their cultural overlap suggests more common cultural bonds than dividing ones.[93] Her persistence in viewing Millat 'through the lens of difference',[94] reflects a culture that is intent upon having 'their *Others* othered' (p.97, original emphasis). This attitude illustrates the fundamental error of this approach to multiculturalism which confuses tokenism with anti-racism and continues to reinforce stereotypes under the auspices of inclusion and education.

Critics of multiculturalism have argued that cultural difference was used as a synonym for racial difference, an approach that reinforced the idea that different cultures and races exist as 'discrete, frozen in time, imperious to external influences', the boundaries between races inherently insurmountable.[95] The biggest criticism of Parekh's seminal conceptualisation of multiculturalism was that it suggested that communities existed in isolation and that differences between them were inherent. Smith's speaks to this most definitively in the novel through the characterisation of Millat, whose globalised identity illustrates that cultural identity is an amalgamation of influences.

> Raggastanis spoke a strange mix of Jamaican patois, Bengali, Gujarati and English. Their ethos, their manifesto, if it could be called that, was equally a hybrid thing: Allah *featured* […] Kung Fu and the works of Bruce Lee were also central to the philosophy; added to this was a smattering of Black Power (as embodied by the album *Fear of a Black Planet*, Public Enemy).[96]

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[93] Smith, *White Teeth*, p.156.
[94] Raphael Dalleo, 'Colonization in Reverse: White Teeth as Caribbean Novel' in *Zadie Smith: Critical Essays* ed.by Tracey Walters, 91 - 104 (p.96).
[95] Modood, p.89.
[96] Smith, *White Teeth*, p.231.

Smith is drawing attention to the fallacy of cultural identities being formed in isolation, both in relation to the false idea of a pure British identity, formed without influence from international cultures, and the idea that minority communities exist within isolated boundaries. Ben Pitcher argues that multiculturalism is a 'shorthand for the persistence of difference', that rather than unifying the nation through an acceptance of hybrid cultures and identities, it resulted in further segregation and demarcation of British identity in opposition to its non-white cultures.[97] In exposing this Smith is highlighting that we are all 'involved […] a consequence of occupation and immigration, of empires and expansion'.[98]

This attitude pervades into the 1990s when the reader is introduced to the racial attitudes of the white middle class via the Chalfens. The early part of the 1990s was marked by the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence and the start of a decades long struggle for justice. In this context, amidst escalating racial tensions, multiculturalism was wielded as a management strategy, an attempt to de-escalate some of the growing tensions in a manner that reasserted institutional control. Irie and Millat are first introduced to the Chalfens as a punishment for being caught smoking marijuana on the school premises and are sent to spend time with the Chalfens in the hopes that the 'stable' environment they provide will put them on the right path;

> This could be a kind of guinea-pig project for a whole range of programmes,' said the headmaster, thinking aloud. 'Bringing children of disadvantaged or minority backgrounds into contact with kids who might have something to offer them. And there could be an exchange, vice versa. Kids teaching kids basketball, football et cetera. We could get *funding*' (p.308).

[97] Pitcher, *The Politics of Multiculturalism*, p.21.
[98] Smith, *White Teeth*, p.439.

This section functions as an indictment of multicultural policies that sponsored programmes aimed at managing diversity from a position that suggested the problems and tensions within society came from its minority populations, 'rather than in the racist institutions that British society had produced'.[99] Smith exposes the underlying racist assumptions beneath social programmes that suggest only white children have something to 'offer', that minority children are all inherently 'disadvantaged' and that the only thing they might have to offer in return are athletic skills. Through these later examples, Smith is illustrating the irony of the institution of social programmes in which the underlying message is the inferiority of minority children and the magnanimity of the white liberals working to 'save' them.

The mantle of 'white saviour' is taken up in earnest by Joyce Chalfen, who imbibes the idea of minorities as inherently disadvantaged or inferior - 'you read a lot about how Afro-Caribbeans seem to find it hard to establish long-term relationships'- and diagnoses Irie and Millat with a wide range of issues that all stem from their racial background.[100]

> And it appeared Millat was filled with self-revulsion and hatred of his own kind; that he had possibly a slave mentality, or maybe a colour-complex centred around his mother (he was far darker than she), or a wish for his own annihilation by means of dilution in a white gene pool, or an inability to reconcile two opposing cultures… (p.375).

Smith runs through a selection of the various discourses surrounding second generation immigrants, arguments against racial mixing that centre around ideas of split allegiances,

[99] Kundnani, p.45.
[100] Smith, *White Teeth*, p.322.

colour complexes and confusion over the culture to which they belong – problematic itself in the suggestion that individuals can, and should, only identify with one culture. In a similar sense to the extract above, Joyce locates these problems within the minority community suggesting they occur as a consequence of racial mixing, rather than interrogating the larger discourses these issues are implicated within. If Millat was 'filled with self-revulsion and hatred of his own kind', it is because the dominant social narrative suggests there is something inherently wrong in being Bengali, brown *and* British.

Smith illustrates the fallacy of the white saviour narrative through allusions to Joyce's approach to gardening. Smith spends time defining the 'thrip', a 'common name for minute insects that feed on a wide range of plants' (p.316). Within this narrative Joyce sees herself as doing a service for the 'delphiniums' by 'prun[ing] ruthlessly' (ibid). Joyce's interpretation of her role in the larger narrative is reflected here; she views herself as someone stepping in to assist for Millat's own good, as a selfless act, when in actuality her role is reversed. Instead of being the fearless crusader for 'delphinium' welfare she believes herself to be, she is in fact the 'thrip':

> Yes. Thrips have good instincts: essentially they are charitable, productive organisms which help the plant in its development. Thrips *mean* well, but thrips go too far, thrips go beyond pollinating and eating pests; thrips begin to eat the plant itself, to eat it from within (ibid).

Joyce, believing in the 'self-revulsion' and 'slave mentality' of second-generation Britons, sees herself as helping Millat by removing barriers to his 'development', using her family ethos as a model for how he should behave in order to succeed. Instead this one-dimensional model is ultimately the downfall of the delphinium, its prescriptive nature cannibalises the

plant, functioning as a metaphor for the ways in which the prescriptive model of British identity, and its attitudes to race, result in the further denigration of Britain's minority population. This cannibalistic approach to difference echoes Kundnani's argument that black art and culture functions as a vital injection of life into a stagnant British culture. The Chalfens represent a white, middle class, comfortably successful population, beginning to question their significance in an increasingly diverse and dynamic social environment. For Joyce, as an individual and the larger population she comes to represent, 'the century was drawing to a close and the Chalfens were bored' (p.314). Irie and Millat arrive just in time to provide her life with some meaning and revitalise her family life – a synecdoche for white Britain – which is slipping into comfortable stagnation.

The novel suggests that it is during this period that attitudes towards mixed race seem to shift. Where the advent of Irie's birth was greeted with hostility and suspicion by Archie's white colleagues in the mid-70s, the attitudes to mixed race that Smith presents in Irie's 1990s section of the novel are more in line with Archie's idealistic imaginings. One of the most quoted passages of the novel is the depiction of a modern day school playground where you can 'find Isaac Leung by the fish pond, Danny Rahman in the football cage, Quang O'Rourke bouncing a basketball, and Irie Jones humming a tune' (p.326). This section in particular has been seized upon as a representation of multicultural life, particularly in reference to the school playground setting, as the classroom has often been cited as a key space of the multicultural project. In this context mixed-race children symbolise a new generation who will consider race differently by the very nature of their own mixedness and their early immersion in the multicultural microcosm of the school playground. Smith's use of culturally hybrid names signifies the further entanglement and inseparability of minority cultures within British society and national identity, the notion of mixed race itself functioning as the personification of these inextricable connections.

The ending of *White Teeth* has often been read as a metaphor for race becoming increasingly obsolete and meaningless in the multicultural future of the new millennium. The finale of the novel sees Irie, a mixed race, half Jamaican woman, raising a baby fathered by one of two potential second generation Bengali-British men, with a middle-class white man. In this mess of entangled cultures, where Irie's mixed-race baby epitomises cultural and racial plurality, critics and reviewers alike have been keen to read this as sign of a successful multiculturalism. Nick Bentley suggests that Irie's multiracial child reflects 'hope for a positive, forward-looking' future that 'represents a significant (although not total) evasion of the weight of the past'.[101] This echoes back to Perfect's idea that mixed race suggests a continuously connected future, where everyone remains 'involved.'[102] In contrast, Molly Thompson argues that Irie's child casts doubt on the 'idea that anyone can have definitive roots'.[103] Building upon this idea, I suggest that Irie's child reflects not only the futility of continuing to police the parameters of national identity through race and the idea of 'roots', but proof of the non-white, immigrant 'rootedness' within British history and its future. It does not suggest that any of the issues the novel raises have been resolved or addressed, merely redirected through the poster image of the mixed-race child, offered as evidence of Britain's successful multiculturalism. Where Joyce Chalfen and Poppy Burt-Jones gesture to the idea of racial and cultural intermixture as a problem that requires management, Smith exposes the long history of interracial contact and the ways in which westernised and globalised societies are increasingly hybrid: both in the sense of Irie's child representing this growing racial multiplicity and the articulation of hybrid and plural cultural identities Millat offers.

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[101] Bentley, p.60.
[102] Smith, *White Teeth*, p.439.
[103] Molly Thompson, '"Happy Multicultural Land"? The Implications of an "excess of belonging" in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*' in *Write Black, Write British* ed.by Kadija Sesay (London: Hansib Publications, 2005), 122 - 140 (p.135).

The distinction Stuart Hall makes between 'multicultural' and 'multiculturalism' is useful here. Hall defines the multicultural as a situation in which 'different cultural communities live together and attempt to build a common life while retaining something of their 'original' identity' and multiculturalism as a reference to 'the strategies and policies adopted to govern or manage the problems of diversity and multiplicity which multi-cultural societies throw up'.[104] What Smith offers through *White Teeth* is the possibility of multicultural life, whilst at the same time providing an incisive view into the politics of multiculturalism, the tensions and falsities of race relations in Britain and the 'strategies and policies' that have tried, and failed, to elicit meaningful or demonstrable progress.

In historicising racial attitudes and multicultural strategies in Britain, Smith illustrates the failure of government sanctioned initiatives to improve the position of ethnic minorities in Britain or challenge the racial assumptions and prejudices embedded within British social discourse. Instead, Smith demonstrates the ways these approaches closed down discussions that had potential to move race relations forward, replacing them instead with exoticising, tokenistic and patronising social actions and policy. Attempts to cultivate an attitude of tolerance towards ethnic minorities and reconcile non-whiteness within conceptions of national identity, both within government policies and social discourse, served only to reinforce the position of the majority. Instead of improving the situation for Britain's minority populations, or affecting social discourse in any meaningful or transformative way, what was offered was a form of 'liberal multiracialism' that supported 'an ongoing colonial project'.[105] Frontier argues that 'multicultural politics are invested in cultivating feelings within and for the nation, often at the expense of examining the legacies and inequalities of

[104] Stuart Hall, 'Conclusion: The Multi-cultural Question' in *Un/Settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, 'Transruptions'* ed.by Barnor Hesse (London: Zed Books, 2000), 209 – 241 (p.209).
[105] Mahtani, p.7.

racialised, gendered, sexualised, class histories'.[106] The era of multiculturalism that Smith outlines in the novel, as well as the one in which she emerged and inadvertently became the face of, was one that was more preoccupied with developing positive feelings towards Britain's ethnic population, 'in turning their negative and stigmatic status into a positive feature of the societies that they are now part of', rather than addressing the structural barriers and 'legacies' that continue to hamper progress.[107]

When discussing the controversial ending of the novel and its lack of nuance, Smith described it as 'a kind of throwing up of hands'.[108]

> All the difficulties with the end of the book, about the end being too fast, and all of the rest of it, are just me not being able to – not having the kind of hardware in my brain – to deal with the software – I couldn't resolve a lot of the issues that the book brought up (ibid).

It is clear that the approaches and vocabulary of multiculturalism identified throughout this chapter, did not result in any real, tangible progress for the status of, or attitudes towards, those racialised in British society. Smith identifies this lack of progress as the result of a continued inability to approach it with the correct 'hardware' – appropriate language, neutral space, equality of opportunity and social standing – without which these larger structural issues and inequalities cannot be resolved. It is clear from the novel, however, that this problem will remain unresolved without 'a battle of ideas, in which alternative narratives - rooted in experiences of migrant […] communities […] are advanced', in a political climate

[106] Frontier, p.7.
[107] Modood, p.43.
[108] Kathleen O'Grady, 'White Teeth: A Conversation with Author Zadie Smith', *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal*, 27:1, (Fall 2002), 105 – 111 (p.107).

in which these conversations are facilitated, stereotypes interrogated, and institutionalised prejudice acknowledged and addressed.[109]

Smith is clear herself that her novel does not hold the key to this, despite the palpable desire to read it as such, though she does 'find a lot to celebrate in the community I live in and the people I see around me'.[110] Whilst noting that 'the possibility of a community which involved so many different people and could be workable was a very optimistic idea',[111] Smith identifies the larger statement of the novel as one in which it remains a possibility, echoing Sara Upstone's articulation of utopia as a combination of realism with optimism.[112] Whilst *White Teeth* offers the reader an insightful critique of the ways in which different approaches to multiculturalism have failed and highlights the continued endurance of racist and ignorant attitudes in Britain, it does not suggest that the idea of a multicultural British society is impossible.

White Teeth shows the reader that multiculturalism as a state directed project has yet to work on any large scale in Britain, but that the lived potential does exist. Through *White Teeth*, Smith criticises the processes of multiculturalism, rather than the idea itself. In *White Teeth*, multiculturalism exists in the small, genuine moments of real life, as an ordinary feat – Clara, Alsana and Neena swapping 'PG tips […] without milk, with lemon' and 'crumbly Indian sweets'[113] on a park bench in Kilburn - rather than institutionalised interventions or well-meaning, yet misguided, gestures from the likes of Poppy Burt-Jones or Joyce Chalfen.

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[109] Kundnani, p.188.
[110] O'Grady, p.107.
[111] 'An interview with Zadie Smith', *Masterpiece*, 2002 <http://mptlegacy.wgbhdigital.org/wgbh/masterpiece/teeth/ei_smith_int.html> [accessed 14 January 2019].
[112] Upstone, *Rethinking Race*, p.13.
[113] Smith, *White Teeth*, p.74.

2. MIXED-RACE DISRUPTION: HARI KUNZRU

In an interview for *The Bookseller* magazine, promoting the release of *The Impressionist* in 2002, Hari Kunzru describes the mixed-race figure 'as a disruptive one but a great one, able to interrogate the cultures around him'.[1] He discusses his intentions of challenging the stereotypical 'mulatto as tragic' discourse through the novel's 'chameleon' protagonist Pran Nath. Kunzru's characterisation of the mixed-race figure as a disruptive one echoes Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity as a disruptive force, a 'problematic of colonial representation […] that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other "denied" knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority'.[2] For Bhabha, hybridity is a direct result of colonial relations and is uniquely positioned to disrupt and re-configure racialised power relations. Kunzru is the first of the high-profile, mixed-race millennial authors considered within this study to have expressed a desire to explore a mixed-race perspective and 'interrogate' the way mixedness is positioned within society. Unlike previous representations of mixedness, which have often considered the mixed-race figure as a marginal one, Bhabha and Kunzru's iteration of the mixed-race figure is that of an empowered force. Rather than the mixed-race experience being characterised by a struggle to adapt and belong, within Kunzru's work the mixed-race figure is strategically positioned to challenge established ideas about what constitutes racial and national identity and culture.

Like many non-white authors in the wake of *White Teeth*'s enormous success in 2000, Kunzru was marketed as 'following closely in the footsteps' of Zadie Smith.[3] Like Smith,

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[1] Hari Kunzru, 'A stumbling journey through the empire', *The Bookseller*, 11 January 2002, p.36.
[2] Homi Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817', *Critical Inquiry*, 12:1 (1985), 144 – 165 (p.156).
[3] 'Rainbaby', *The Economist*, 4 April 2002 <https://www.economist.com/books-andarts/2002/04/04/rainbaby> [accessed 14 January 2019].

Kunzru is a mixed race, Oxbridge educated Londoner. Unlike Smith, however, whose refusal to acknowledge any similarity between herself and her multicultural, non-white protagonists was much noted, Kunzru explicitly spoke to the parallels between his own experience of growing up mixed race in Britain in the 1970s and the experiences of the mixed-race protagonist in his first novel. This chapter will explore the ways in which notions of authenticity and cultural identity interact with those of mixed race and interracial relationships by examining Kunzru's debut novel *The Impressionist* (2002), his most recent novel *White Tears* (2017) and his own public persona, to explore the ways in which hybridity and the mixed-race figure, both within and outside of fiction, act as a socially disruptive and interrogative force.

THE IMPRESSIONIST, 2002

A promotional insert for the publication of *The Impressionist* features a letter addressed to the reader in which Kunzru states that

> *The Impressionist* is a very personal book, though not in a straightforward way. I wanted to write about my own peculiar, fluid experience of race and identity. My father is Indian, my mother English, and I grew up in suburban London. Being mixed race involves a lot of guesswork, mostly by other people […] *The Impressionist* is a story of a mixed-race boy trying to work out where he is from 'really'.[4]

Racial mixing is the central theme of Kunzru's debut novel and he has stated that the novel explicitly works through ideas about identity and authenticity that get attached to notions of

[4] *The Impressionist* chapter preview, distributed by *Quality Paperbacks Direct.*

mixed race. The novel is set in colonial India and Britain at the start of the twentieth century and speaks directly to the key tenets of Robert Young's 1997 study *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. The intersections of colonialism, national identity, race and sex are thoroughly explored within the novel which examines approaches and attitudes towards racial mixing during Victorian colonial rule, as well as exploring ideas about passing, authenticity and identity that are bound within notions of mixed race. The novel itself forms a historiographical account of theories and attitudes towards racial mixing in colonial Britain and India, whilst illustrating the ways in which those, ostensibly archaic, ideas still circulate within societal discourse today. In doing so, Kunzru's text forms a 'historical stemma between the cultural concepts of our own day and those of the past from which we tend to assume that we have distanced ourselves […] hybridity in particular shows the connections between the racial categories of the past and contemporary cultural discourse'.[5]

The key themes of Kunzru's novel - a fascination with otherness and racial mixing, its exploration of the intersection of race and national identity, the fetishisation of blackness and preoccupation with authentic racial identity - are shown to be as much of a concern at the end of the twentieth century as at the start. The fervent need to categorise Pran in mono-racial terms that defines much of the novel, is also outlined by Kunzru as a defining factor of his own experience of growing up mixed-race in the Britain of the 1970s. The propensity of other people to engage in 'guesswork' about his racial identity in order to discover where he is 'really from' draws attention to the continuing fascination with identifying people through mono-racial frameworks and the persistence of the idea that there is an authentic and singular point of origin/racial and national identity.

[5] Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (Oxon: Routledge, 1995), p.27.

Whilst interracial union between the colonisers and the colonised had been common during the early stages of Empire, during the Victorian period attitudes towards interracial sex changed as 'white British attitudes towards other races – bolstered by science – became more openly and unashamedly aggressive'.[6] Relations with the colonial 'other', particularly native women, were seen as a degradation of British men, a degeneration of the white race and a slow erosion of British integrity and culture. As a result, ordinances were passed that forbade sexual relations with the indigenous people. Blackness and otherness 'evoke[d] an attractive, but dangerous, sexuality, an apparently abundant, limitless, but threatening, fertility'.[7] The fear of desire for the racial other resulted in stereotypes of the 'dangerous', hyper-sexualised native woman, scheming to erode Britishness from within; portraying native women in this way justified colonial desire and preserved ideas about British purity and nobility.

The novel's central protagonist starts his journey as Pran Nath, the product of an 'ungovernable' Indian mother, Amrita, and an appropriately named English forester, Ronald Forrester. [8] Whilst on her way towards an arranged marriage, Amrita's journey is interrupted by a flash flood during which she takes shelter in a cave and rescues Forrester from his certain death. His first impression of Amrita is that she is 'ferocious. Her body is smeared with mud. A wild tangle of hair hangs over her face. She is entirely naked' (p.13). He is 'awed by the black-tipped breasts, the curve of the belly, the small tight mat of pubic hair' (p.13). Whilst Forrester 'averts his eyes' (p.13), it is Amrita who is the sexual aggressor; she 'drags the pearl man backwards', and, 'helpless', strips him of his clothes (p.15). Their sex is 'violent, more fight than sex as they roll and claw across the packed earth floor' (p.15).

[6] Caballero and Aspinall, p.4.
[7] Young, p.97.
[8] Hari Kunzru, *The Impressionist* (London: Penguin, 2003), p.9.

The implication here is that native women use desire as a deliberate ploy to bring down the Empire and Amrita embodies this stereotype of the calculating, threatening and dangerous native woman. She is the untamed sexual aggressor who is literally and figuratively dragging the white man backwards. Her open and explicit sexuality is juxtaposed against 'picture-postcard girls, flimsy as lace' who 'peep back over parasols, milk white and rosy-cheeked, asking oh will you not come into the garden my dear', British women whose sexuality is coquettishly hinted at rather than unashamedly explored (p.13). Their sex is 'violent', the implication that this aggression is fuelled by her hatred of the Empire, and their union becomes a 'fight' between the coloniser and the colonised. The 'sweat and dust […] turned their skins to an identical red-brown colour', a physical representation of Forrester's debasement to native level, and it is at this moment that he realises the error of his ways (p.15). His guilt over neglecting his 'duty', violating 'India Office ordinances' and his irrevocable debasement registers and he throws himself back into the flood, choosing death over living with the consequences of this sexual interaction (p.15).

Young argues that the intense fear regarding interracial sex was centred on the consequences of sexual interaction between white men and native women: mixed-race offspring. Narratives of the time espoused that native women were unnaturally fertile and that the product of such interaction posed a 'threat' to civilisation as the mulatto child was believed to be innately criminal, sterile, intellectually deficient and overtly sexual. Young argues that 'fear of miscegenation can be related to the notion that without such hierarchy, civilisation would, in a literal as well as a technical sense, collapse'.[9] Yet Kunzru's novel suggests that what was specifically feared was that the disintegration of racial boundaries signified a larger collapse of the Empire's power, a fear that was heightened as the Empire started to decline. Amrita's 'ungovernable' nature is a reference to wider ideas about the

[9] Young, p.95.

wild, uncivilised nature of indigenous people and a symbolic reference to the diminishing power of the Empire as a whole. These ideas are interestingly explored, and disrupted, through the birth and early life of Pran Nath, the result of Amrita and Forrester's fatal union. Pran's 'pale', 'white' skin, hair which had a 'hint of copper to it' and eyes that 'contain just a touch of green' are valorised, seen as proof of Pran's 'superior' Kashmiri heritage and he is held up as the epitome of his caste.[10]

Once his true heritage is revealed however, these markers of racial privilege immediately become proof of his degeneracy. Upon revealing the truth of his heritage, his mother's maid Anjali expresses many of the stereotypical fears regarding mixed race:

> She expounds on the theme of miscegenation, and all its terrible consequences. Impurities, blendings, pollutions, smearings and muckings up of all kinds are bound to flow from such a blend of blood, which offends against every tenet of orthodox religion. Small wonder the city of Agra is suffering a plague. She, for one, would not be surprised to discover that the entire influenza epidemic, all twenty million global deaths of it, was down to Pran (p.39).

Many of the commonly held ideas about mixed race of the time are touched upon in Anjali's outburst - polluted blood lines and going against God result in the literal collapse of society in Agra via an influenza epidemic – yet Kunzru's tongue-in-cheek tone highlights the ridiculousness of such ideas. Kunzru echoes and exaggerates fears about miscegenation whilst also disrupting them; instead of white, British culture being at risk of degeneration as a result of native blood, in this instance it is Indian culture that is tainted and white blood that is the danger. Whilst this corroborates theories of racial mixing prevalent at the time, it

[10] Kunzru, *The Impressionist*, p.20.

destabilises the idea of white Britishness as the apex of the racial hierarchy and of British blood being the only 'pure' blood. Many of the ideas circulated about mixed race, as shown above, presented native women as calculating women whose intentions were to defile British men, yet Anjali's outburst, and the casting out of Pran that follows, disrupts that narrative. Through Pran's journey and change of fortunes, Kunzru explicitly draws attention to the ways in which the social prospects and positions of racialised others, particularly those of mixed race, are overtly determined by their proximity to whiteness.

Ideas about the degeneracy of mixed-race progeny recur later in the novel, as Pran becomes Robert after being taken in by Scottish missionaries Andrew and Elspeth MacFarlane. Whilst in Africa, before meeting his wife, Andrew suffers a similar fate to Ronald Forrester and succumbs to the temptation of a local mission girl's 'little studs of […] breasts' and 'rush-fringed vulva' (p.227). This interaction again results in a 'pale creature', one of many in a village populated by whole families of 'half-breed children […] bearing the tell-tale crook nose or jug ears of the Plantation Manager, or the Engineer' (p.228). He attempts to correct his mistake by leaving Africa, marrying Elspeth and continuing his mission of converting the sinful in India, yet this incident marks the start of his decline. His wife adapts to life in India and is no longer reliant on him, his mission fails and he is denied access to his wife's body on doctors' orders; the recounting of these failures are interspersed with obsessive musings about the degenerate products of racial mixing. 'His young wife flourished. Her energy seemed boundless' is followed immediately by 'the European has crossed with every known race of humanity in the course of his conquest of the world. This miscegenation has resulted in an inextricable mass of mixed peoples, perfectly comparable with our street dogs and roof cats' (p.231). Interspersed between these musings on his life and miscegenation, are feverish references, to 'Fucking' and 'the Negress's vagina' (p.231). Young describes the term 'colonial desire' as 'a covert but insistent obsession with

transgressive, inter-racial sex, hybridity and miscegenation' and Kunzru's juxtaposition of the decline of the Reverend's masculinity, both in relation to his position within the home and society, against his illegitimate, mixed-race offspring and his sexual desire for the 'other', foreground the inextricable ways in which these desires and anxieties intersect.[11] Anxieties over the decline of masculinity and status of the Empire are mediated through, and blamed upon, the hyper-sexualisation of native women and their mixed-race offspring.

One of the most interesting aspects of Kunzru's work as a whole, but particularly *The Impressionist*, is his examination of whiteness. The novel, whilst ostensibly being about a mixed-race Indian and his journey towards belonging and acceptance, is actually a quest to understand what it means to be white and British and an investigation of the mechanisms with which we recognise and assign racial authenticity. Before Pran's heritage is revealed, he spends little time on self-examination and suffers, if anything, from an excess of privilege and belonging. It is once his whiteness is revealed as whiteness, rather than simply lightness, that his internal racial crisis begins.

> He does not feel like an Englishman. He is Indian, a Kashmiri Pandit. He knows what he is. He feels it. […] You are what you feel. Or if not, you should feel like what you are. But if you are something you don't know yourself to be, what are the signs? What is the feeling of not being who you think you are?[12]

It is the external fear of non-whiteness that catalyses his internal fear of it. In their exploration of the novel, Childs and Green refer to the character as Pran throughout, with the caveat that they use the name of his first incarnation without the 'intention to imply that this

[11] Young, p.xii.
[12] Kunzru, *The Impressionist*, p.52.

represents his true, essential identity'.[13] Whilst it is necessary to avoid falling into the trap of suggesting that such a thing as an authentic racial identity exists, I would argue that up until this point identifying as a Kashmiri Pandit, 'feeling' like he belonged within that community, felt authentic for Pran. He 'knew' what he was before external forces told him otherwise; the paleness of his skin, his mixed racial heritage at this point still have no real bearing on who, and 'what', he 'knows' himself to be. It is external forces telling him that what he feels isn't what he is that catalyses his racial identity crisis, highlighting that ideas and confusion about racial authenticity are in large part imposed by external forces; that identities are authentic to mixed-race individuals until they are challenged and denied by external forces that insist upon mono-racial, i.e. 'authentic', categorisation and identification.

Pran's search for the 'signs' of authenticity, serve to highlight the extent to which ideas of authentic racial identification are inextricable from signifiers such as skin colour. Childs and Green read *The Impressionist* as a novel which 'emphasises the performativity of ethnic and cultural identities' and Pran's multiple incarnations, alongside the relative ease with which he adopts and sheds personas, highlight the fallacy of notions of an authentic racial and cultural identity (p.63). This fluidity of identity, however, is specific to the mixed-race figure; it is Pran's lightness of skin that allows him to pass so successfully as British and that raises suspicion about the legitimacy of his Kashmiri heritage. It is also the mixed-race figure for whom the question of authenticity is most fraught, and, whilst portraits of racially confused mixed-race people continue to be commonplace, Pran's journey highlights the extent to which said crisis and confusion is imposed by external forces. As Kunzru's earlier statement shows, it is the 'guesswork' of 'other people' that contributes to the confusion and feelings of displacement so commonly invoked within narratives of mixed race.

[13] Peter Childs and James Green, *Aesthetics and Ethics in Twenty-First Century British Novels* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p.92.

From this point on Pran spends the rest of the novel struggling to find a place for himself, both literally and metaphorically. He is sold into prostitution, at first within a brothel and then to a palace's harem of eunuchs. During this period Pran becomes Rukhsana, smuggled out of the brothel in 'purdah clothes. Women's clothes'[14] to become a 'hijra', one of the 'women-men […] outcasts, as ancient as the hills, a human dirty joke' (p.72). In her exploration of the hijra figure in the contemporary media and politics, Tara Atluri argues that the hijra figure disrupts persistent orientalist frameworks of gender and sexuality.

> In addition to quantifying Hijras as deviant based on the rupturing of gender binaries on which the bourgeois family and subsequent systems of property ownership and inheritance rest, Hijras were criminalized for their appearances in public space. […] Hijras were criminalized for appearing ' ... dressed or ornamented like a woman, in a public street or place, or in any other place, with the intention of being seen from a public street or place' […] The quantification of sexual others before the law conceives of sexed/gendered citizens as bodies that can be named, ordered and appraised through bureaucratic categorizations of state power.[15]

Kunzru's invocation of the hijra figure, and its association with his mixed-race protagonist, draws parallels between the ways in which both figures signify the pervasiveness of regressive, Orientalist notions of sexuality and race, but also the transgressive potential of both to disrupt and reconfigure this framework. Atluri argues that the 'examples of sexual politics articulated by Hijras […] gesture to a sexual citizenship after, beyond, and outside orientalism', a thought model that is echoed by Kunzru's articulation of mixedness as a

[14] Kunzru, *The Impressionist*, p.66.
[15] Tara Atluri, 'The prerogative of the brave: Hijras and sexual citizenship after orientalism', *Citizenship Studies*, 16:5-6 (2012), 721- 736 (p.728).

gesture towards a mode of identification outside enforced boundaries of race (p.722). Kunzru's invocation of a mixed-race hijra through Rukhsana, explicitly links the history of over-sexualisation, criminalisation and social isolation common to both experiences and the over-determination of both subject positions by intervening, colonial forces.

Pran's androgynous good looks and ambiguous sexuality further disrupt this orientalist framework and mirror his ambiguous racial identity, yet it is precisely this racial, sexual and gender ambiguity that is irresistible to white British colonisers. Young argues that during this time period, ideas about sexuality followed 'the norm/deviation model of race as of sexuality' which 'meant that 'perversions' such as homosexuality became associated with the degenerate products of miscegenation'.[16] Unlike heterosexual relations, however, homosexuality in this context 'posed no threat because it produced no children' which, as illustrated earlier in this chapter, was the prevalent fear of interracial relationships (p.26). Ideas about fertility are also tied to the hijra figure who, whilst rendered infertile by the process of castration, are traditionally assigned the power to 'confer fertility on newlyweds or newborn children'.[17] The degeneracy of Pran's mixed race is embodied not only in the colour of his skin, but through his gender fluidity and enforced homosexuality. Despite his time in the Palace harem, Pran's hijra transformation is never fully realised and as such his fertility remains a threat.

This combination of sexual and racial exoticness proves irresistible to Major Privett-Clampe, representative of white male Britishness. Privett-Clampe's 'weakness' is 'beautiful boy-girls' like Pran and the homosexual element of their relationship adds an additional layer of degeneracy to relations between the two.[18] Upon seeing Pran for the first time 'an expression of beatific joy' (p.93) lights up the Major's face and he 'bounds' enthusiastically

[16] Young, p.26.
[17] Atluri, p.723.
[18] Kunzru, *The Impressionist*, p.87.

towards Pran, committing sexual assault on a native whilst wearing his British uniform (p.94). This first sexual encounter is marked by the Major's 'regular full-throated hunting cries' and shouts of '"Tally-ho!"', 'the bed groan[ing] with the effort of maintaining its structural integrity' (p.98). This scene epitomises all the ideas and fears encapsulated in 'colonial desire' as Young terms it. The Major's hunting cries epitomise colonial ideas of the natives as savages, little better than animals that exist for their entertainment and pleasure. These savage noises, however, emerge from the Major's mouth and challenge who the real 'savage' is in this exchange, the sexual interaction between Pran and the Major emblematic of the true nature of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. Kunzru's use of hunting imagery, a controversial pursuit associated with upper-class British men hunting foxes with dogs, exposes the true dynamics and power relations of colonialism as a process in which a wealthy, white nation 'hunts', i.e. colonises, a 'lower', poorer and less empowered nation for their own gain.

As with hunting, however, regardless of the theoretical justifications offered for it, there is an element of pleasure derived from the exertion of power over a creature that cannot defend itself. The Major's cries of 'Tally ho' are emblematic of British colonial exploitation of that imbalance of power, with the rape of Pran representing the violence of colonialism. The bed itself, whose integrity is compromised by this sexual interaction between India and Britain, represents the structure and hierarchy of the Empire which is threatened and weakened through such encounters. It is at once an exploration of the theories of degeneracy and fear that were attached to ideas of mixed race within this period and a commentary upon the reality of Empire, Britishness and whiteness which debases and attacks the people it ostensibly 'saves', all whilst maintaining a façade of noble Britishness by donning official uniforms, shouting 'tally ho' and 'shaking hands' on the way out (p.99). Just as Anjali's outburst reverses the attitudes towards mixed race and presents Britishness as the

degenerative force, so too does this encounter perform a reversal; it is not the natives that are the savage, dangerous force here but the British.

Although he regrets his actions immediately after climax, this does not stop the Major developing a relationship with Pran. He sends for Pran a second time, but passes out before anything can happen between them. The third time he sees Pran sober, he tries to justify his actions by saying he is not a 'bad man' or 'some kind of degenerate', expressing horror at the fact that they have dressed Pran as a woman; 'you're supposed to be a chap, not a bleeding *girl*!', regardless of the facts of their first interaction (p.108). In an effort to alleviate his conscience he gives Pran presents, a 'set of English clothes', dressing him as an English school-boy (p.109). This exchange is emblematic of narratives of Empire - British culture and schooling in exchange for invasion and occupation. The gift of the Major's school uniform coincides with his realisation that Pran has 'some white blood' in him which prompts him to abstain from molesting Pran any further (p.109). At this point Pran becomes his civilising project and his time with the Major is spent learning to recite English verse. At first the Major finds sexual gratification in his civilising mission, 'moaning and bouncing up and down on the swivel chair', sexually excited both by the prospect of making Pran English and by the visual representation of his mixed heritage, a 'native' boy in white British dress (p.111). The better Pran's accent and recitation becomes, the closer to white Britishness he gets, the less the Major desires him suggesting that his sexual desire is connected to the idea of the exotic other. The more Pran appears like an 'authentic' British boy, the less he is able to sexually exploit him without his conscience getting in the way. As Pran's identity starts to mutate into a more complex hybrid of Britain and India, the Major's feelings for this incarnation of Pran start to shift alongside his name.

> He plumbed new depths by allowing Flowers […] to introduce him to the beautiful boy he thinks of as Clive. Clive has aroused so many conflicting emotions in his breast that he barely knows where to begin. There is no doubt about it. The Major feels *romantically* towards him. There is, he tells himself, nothing exploitative about his desire (p.131).

In the Major's eyes the closer Pran gets to whiteness the worthier he is of love and affection and the less able the Major is to act upon his sexual desires. The continual 'jiggl[ing] around under his desk' showcases that the desire is still there, yet the Major can no longer morally justify acting upon it (p.112). Instead he re-writes the narrative of his actions, denying them as exploitative 'sodden toilings' and re-framing them as 'improving' actions (p.131).

In this new narrative, the narrative of Empire, the Major is 'a mentor, a guide through the perils and pitfalls of life' (p.131). It is the 'degree of white blood' coursing through his veins that redeems Pran in the Major eyes, yet Kunzru's narrative suggests that it is whiteness itself – British culture and colonial values – that is irredeemable (p.131). Whilst narratives of Empire and miscegenation suggest that blackness is the degenerative influence, Kunzru's narrative speaks against this, presenting white male masculinity as sexually aggressive and exploitative. Kunzru's narrative suggests that fear of the mixed-race figure is as much about the notion of this figure as a physical manifestation of guilt and remorse, as about ideas of physical and mental inferiority and weakening of the race. Through the bastions of white masculinity represented by the Reverend and Major, Kunzru interrogates what it means to be white British, critiquing the ideas of Britishness and Empire that circulated during the Victorian period and continue to be bound up within ideas about national identity in contemporary British society. Cultural critic Gary Younge, as well as geopolitical critics

Bachmann and Sidaway,[19] have argued that this 'deluded' sense of Empire, the idea of Britain as a superpower, contributed to the 2016 Brexit vote to leave the European Union:

> While the Brexit vote was certainly underpinned by a melancholic longing for a glorious past, the era it sought to relive was less the Second World War than the longer, less distinguished or openly celebrated period of empire. For if memories of the war made some feel more defiant, recollections of empire made them deluded. Our colonial past, and the inability to come to terms with its demise, gave many the impression that we are far bigger, stronger and more influential than we really are.[20]

Kunzru's novels highlights the fantasies of Empire – of Britain as all-powerful, morally and intellectually superior – that dominated despite its sharp decline in the twentieth century, parallels with which can be seen in the ideologies that have re-circulated again in debates about Britain's decision to leave the European Union.

Whilst Pran's journey exposes the fallacy of the idea of an authentic racial identity, it also challenges the notions of British identity that continue to underpin social discourse. His first interaction with British culture as Clive, is followed by becoming Bobby with the Reverend and Mrs MacFarlane. After being treated with respect by an infantry officer, Pran realises that he can pass for being English and it quickly becomes his new preoccupation. He spends his time investigating and attempting to embody Britishness, learning that 'the point is to tell them a story. Any story will do, so long as it is English. Or rather about *being*

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[19] Veit Bachmann and James D. Sidaway, 'Brexit geopolitics', *Geoforum*, Volume 77 (December 2016), 47 – 50.
[20] Gary Younge, 'Britain's imperial fantasies have given us Brexit', *The Guardian*, 3 February 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/03/imperial-fantasies-brexit-theresa-may> [accessed 14 January 2019].

English'.[21] When he arrives in England as Jonathan Bridgeman, Pran writes his observations about what it means to be British in a notebook, believing that by understanding the 'significance of lawns' or cricket, 'Englishness seeps a little deeper into his skin' (p.307). Whilst Pran's interactions with white British men in India illustrate the hypocrisy of the idea of the noble, self-sacrificing British male, this Britishness by rote approach highlights the delusions of Britishness upon which the Empire, and the nation's own mythology of self, rests. Childs and Green term this the 'paradox […] at the heart of the colonial project', where

> Europeans legitimated their civilizing mission through recourse to a constructed ethnic hierarchy, [yet] the process of civilization itself suggested that cultural identity could be exchanged and acquired, and therefore the very notion of authenticity became deeply problematic.[22]

As it becomes apparent from Pran's own ability to embody Englishness, so successfully that Star rejects his romantic advances for being the 'most conventional person' she knows, Britishness, as an identity, is presented as shallow and inauthentic, constructed from a series of insignificant stereotypes and larger delusions and hypocrisies.[23] Whilst the deterioration of the racial hierarchy and the instability of the British position was attributed to sexual and racial degeneracy at the hands of the native population, it becomes clear that it rested upon an insubstantial and unstable foundation.

It is both Pran's lightness and his good looks that allow him entry into white British society, yet the identity he has so carefully constructed and cultivated is revealed as hollow. Michele Elam has argued that 'race and class continue to be indexed in close statistical

[21] Kunzru, *The Impressionist*, p.245.
[22] Childs and Green, p.68.
[23] Kunzru, *The Impressionist*, p.415.

relation' and in this sense lightness equates to the possibility of social mobility in a way that is denied to darker-skinned people.[24] Pran's lightness enables him to infiltrate British society in such a manner that the reader is forced to examine all the entrenched beliefs about what it means to be British and white. It is in this sense that the mixed-race figure, as Kunzru sees it, is a disruptive force and Pran's numerous iterations, his ability to shapeshift and occupy myriad identities, is tied into his mixedness. Elam argues that mixed race is 'a performative mode of social engagement', and, through Pran's journey, Kunzru dissects notions of authenticity, identity, narratives of Empire and the fallacies of white British benevolence and nobility (p.xix).

Barbara Schaff argues that Kunzru's invocation of mimicry through Pran's multiple personas illustrates 'that the mimicry of the colonized subject violates […] any notion of stable selfhood'.[25] I would argue further that Pran's ability to manipulate the perception of his own racial identity more broadly disrupts the mythology attached to national identity and Empire, illustrating the instability of constructing a hierarchy of power based on the idea of a national identity that is rooted in race. Whether Pran is considered Kashmiri or British, his national identity is inherently connected to his skin colour. At the beginning of the novel Pran 'feels' like a Kashmiri, yet it is his skin colour - more specifically, other people's perception of his national identity in relation to his skin colour - that disrupts this sense of belonging. Though the reader is never given the sense that Pran ever achieves a sense of belonging in Britain or within a white British identity, his light skin means that his racial and national identity is never questioned once he moves to Britain. Kunzru's novel highlights the fallacy and construction of national identity which has always been, and continues to be, an

[24] Elam, p.18.
[25] Barbara Schaff, 'Trying to Escape, Longing to Belong: Roots, Genes and Performativity in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist*' in *Transcultural English Studies,* ed. by Frank Schulze-Engler and Sissy Helff (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 281 – 292 (p.289).

inherently raced concept that has 'become so closely identified that to speak of the nation is to speak automatically in racially exclusive terms'.[26] Gilroy argues that true 'accounts of colonial war must be owned so that they can become useful in understanding the empire, in making sense of its bequest to the future and its impact on the moral and political contents of British national identity'.[27] It is this project that Kunzru's novel speaks to, the mixed-race figure crucial to the illustration of hypocritical narratives of Empire.

British national identity is presented as something that can be adopted and learned depending on one's proximity to whiteness, rather than something innate, authentic or exclusive to white British people. Young argues that hybridity works to make 'difference into sameness, and sameness into difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer simply different […] a breaking and a joining at the same time, in the same place.'[28] Race is the easiest way to demarcate and separate the people of the homeland from the people of the colonies and to establish clear boundaries. Pran's mixedness blurs these boundaries as his skin colour makes it harder to distinguish between sameness and difference and his near seamless integration into British society performs this act of transforming British sameness into difference invisibly, without notice. The number of mixed-race figures that the reader encounters throughout the text, as well as the numerous instances of interracial sexual relations, illuminates Britain's history of racial mixing. Bhabha argues that hybridity is a space that estranges the basis of authority and lets 'denied knowledge in' and in Kunzru's novel the mixed-race figure is a powerful disruptive force, a subject position through which ideas about race, skin colour and the nation are challenged and most overtly instable.[29]

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[26] Gilroy, *Small Acts*, p.27.
[27] Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture* (Oxfordshire, Routledge, 2004), p.52.
[28] Young, p.26.
[29] Bhabha, p.156.

Childs and Green argue that it is 'precisely the total authority, yet absolute meaninglessness, of the construction of 'race' structuring the colonial relationship that allows Pran to exploit its contradictions'.[30] What becomes clear from Kunzru's narrative is that the power to assign racial identities has always rested with the coloniser, the white majority. Whilst Pran is able to manipulate the system, he lives in constant fear that he will be discovered; this fear results in him losing any sense of self, as well as the few meaningful relations he develops along the way. On the surface Pran appears to be manipulating the system, yet the system is always manipulating him, promising him a sense of stability, respect and belonging that never arrives. Once his white heritage is revealed, he is stripped of a sense of belonging in India and his own anxieties about maintaining his façade of Britishness ensure he never feels secure in England. Kunzru draws attention to the ways in which racial identity is tied to external perceptions of race and persistent power inequities between whiteness and otherness.

The emotional toll of existing in accordance with this framework psychologically diminishes Pran. Whilst the lightness of his skin and his white heritage provide him with the opportunity for social mobility, his position is always a precarious and unstable one. In his attempt to construct himself in the image of Britishness, he loses any sense of self. The self-assured arrogant boy the reader is introduced to in the beginning of the novel, is replaced by a hollow, fragile impressionist.

> So Bobby is a creature of surface. Tissue paper held up to the sun. He hints at transparency, as if on the other side, on the inside, there is something to be discovered. Maybe there is, maybe not. Maybe instead of imagining depth, all the people who do not quite know him should accept that Bobby's skin is not a boundary

[30] Childs and Green, p.67.

> between things but the thing itself, a screen on which certain effects take place. Ephemeral curiosities. Tricks of the light.[31]

This quote highlights the effects that a hierarchy based on skin colour and constructions of race have on those racialised within it, particularly the additional burden placed on those of mixed race in a system which insists on breaking down them in the search to 'discover' their true racial identity. Binary notions of race that circulated during Empire perpetuate the erection of boundaries between races, examining the mixed-race figure for signs of blackness or markers of whiteness, rather than challenging the insistence on established binaries or examining the motivations behind continuing to enforce them. Kunzru's metaphor of the mixed-race body as a screen is reflective of the ways in which ideas about race are projected onto it. The mixed-race figure becomes a site of projection for dominant ideas, and fears, about race, rather than an individual in its own right.

WHITE TEARS, 2017

Fifteen years after the publication of *The Impressionist*, Kunzru continues to challenge assumptions about racial and cultural identity, and the ideas of authenticity that are connected to them, with his latest novel *White Tears*. *White Tears* takes place in a different space and context to *The Impressionist*, yet many of the themes that circulate within the text are reminiscent of those that run through his debut. Whereas mixed-race Pran does everything within his power to distance himself from blackness, the white protagonists of *White Tears*, Seth and Carter, do everything within their power to bring themselves closer to it. The fetishisation of blackness in *The Impressionist* is about sex and power, a racialised power

[31] Kunzru, *The Impressionist*, p.250.

struggle that the protagonists of *White Tears* are still embroiled in. This section of the chapter will explore the ways in which ideas about authentic racial identity, white privilege and cultural appropriation are explored within the novel and the ways in which ideas about racial authenticity are co-opted and circulate as social capital within contemporary society.

Whilst, on the surface, *White Tears* appears to suggest that an authentic black identity does exist, I argue that Kunzru's latest novel cautions against continuing to talk about racial identity in terms of authenticity. White cultural appropriation is condemned in Kunzru's latest work and is presented as a continued subjugation of black people. Carter's attempt to align himself with an authentic black identity is shown to be ridiculous and damaging in equal measure, seeming to suggest that an authentic black identity exists when thrown into sharp relief by Carter's sheer wrongness and inauthenticity. In *The Impressionist*, identity is portrayed as something that can be learned, studied and adopted, a product of a variety of stereotypes and external projections, rather than something that is innate or connected to race or nationality. I argue that Kunzru develops these ideas further in *White Tears*, using Seth and Carter as examples of the ways in which mechanisms of authenticity solidify racialised power relations and boundaries. It is particularly significant that this story of the cultural appropriation of African-American culture is brought to the literary marketplace by a mixed race, British Asian author and the latter section of the chapter will turn its attention to the ways in which Kunzru's authorial identity interrupts, and is positioned within, these discourses of authenticity and appropriation.

Pran's journey in *The Impressionist* showcases the fallacy of racial authenticity. Pran is able to manipulate the system and adopt a convincing white British identity by studying British culture and imitating the examples of white masculinity surrounding him. Ultimately, however, this is shown to be a hollow quest and the identity he works so hard to embody is exposed as a collage of stereotypes that never results in a true sense of belonging yet carries

the consequence of stripping him of any sense of self. Cultural appropriation in this context is presented as a survival tool, but a futile one. Culture in this context equates to a series of ideas the British have about themselves and white British culture is presented as hollow and deceptive. In contrast, black African-American culture is portrayed as rich, full of depth and history in *White Tears* and identity is fluid for Pran, because of his mixed race, in a way that it can never be for the white protagonists of *White Tears*. Carter and Seth obsessively fetishise and exploit black history and culture, seeking to own it and replicate it through their music, a desire which is condemned within the novel. Their tracks mimic authenticity without displaying any real interest in, or empathy for, the context within which the music they fetish arose.

The novel follows two white college graduates, Seth and Carter, as they develop an obsession with the blues in a contemporary, affluent and hipster enclave of New York. They meet in college and bond over their mutual obsession with obscure blues tracks, building a record company whose success is based upon their ability to replicate the sounds of music from the civil rights era. Their quest to both own, and replicate, the sounds of 1950s blues musicians leads to their ruin in a tale that has been described as a 'satire of cultural appropriation'[32] and a 'zeitgeisty ghost story that warns against cultural appropriation'.[33] They produce a track so eerily authentic that it invokes a ghost of this era, Charlie Shaw, an ephemeral bluesman the duo believe they have manufactured, who manifests to wreak havoc on their lives and take revenge for the myriad of ways in which African-American lives and culture have been co-opted and abused by a privileged white population who continue to

[32] Sukhdev Sandhu, 'White Tears by Hari Kunzru review – a satire of cultural appropriation', *The Guardian*, 28 April 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/apr/28/white-tears-hari-kunzru-review> [accessed 24 January 2019].
[33] Lucy Scholes, 'White Tears by Hari Kunzru, book review: As in all the best ghost stories, the reader is never quite sure what's real and what isn't', *The Independent*, 5 April 2017 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/white-tears-hari-kunzru-book-review-a7667861.html> [accessed 24 January 2019].

benefit financially and culturally from the subjugation of black people within America. Kunzru eviscerates his over-privileged, white male protagonists, college graduates who exchange their liberal arts colleges for the hipster spaces of Brooklyn and Manhattan and for whom symbols of black culture function as markers of 'cool' capital. Carter Wallace's 'coolness' is constructed from a mixture of appropriated sources: 'blond dreadlocks, intricate tattoos […] the best collection of vinyl records, the best drugs', 'a blond beard plaited into a sort of fashionable rope, no shirt and a tattoo of Mexican *calaveras* on his chest'.[34] The ethnic origin or history of the symbols Carter uses to decorate his body is irrelevant as he is more interested what they communicate about his persona, then what the symbols themselves represent. Carter is a representation of what Gilroy terms 'traffickers in black culture':

> white consumers, many of whom take pleasure in the transgression and dangerousness which these once-forbidden commodities express, without discovering a similar enthusiasm for either the company of real live black people or the history of their struggles against slavery, for citizenship and towards personal and social autonomy.[35]

Carter becomes a parody of himself after a trip to California, returning in the guise of a 'Superfly' 1970s Blaxploitation star in a 'porkpie hat and an army jacket and vintage Nike sneakers and two fistfuls of silver rings'.[36] The most prominent feature of Carter's construction of coolness is his obsession with black culture, specifically black music; 'everything he played was by black musicians. Many different styles but always black music […] Carter didn't so much as play me his record collection as narrate it' (p.9).

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[34] Hari Kunzru, *White Tears* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2017), p.8.
[35] Gilroy, *Small Acts*, p.4.
[36] Kunzru, *White Tears*, p.23.

Black music and culture, and the financial capital to acquire it, is central to Carter's ability to maintain his cool demeanour. He has a trust fund that enables him to travel, 'further the cause of maximum good times' (p.6) and, as Seth caustically remarks, much of his time in California must have been spent 'buying hats and jackets and sneakers and rings' (p.23). Kunzru's phrasing is revealing here as money, the financial freedom to have 'bought' the music, the clothes and the equipment that contributes towards his aesthetic, is a key component of Carter's individual image and social position. It is also reflective of the larger workings of the music industry, through which black voices have historically been exploited and appropriated by record labels owned by white men. Kunzru's presentation of Carter, and the over privileged, wealthy section of the white American population he represents, is a sharply drawn portrayal of what Jim McGuigan terms 'cool capitalism', where the ideas of dissent and rebellion that are attached to black culture, specifically black music, are incorporated into the mainstream – i.e. white culture - and neutralised. McGuigan defines cool capitalism as the 'incorporation of disaffection into capitalism itself' and argues that the space in which this relationship is most apparent is within white adoption of black culture:[37]

> The most evident site of cool in the United States […] was in black music and style, most notably in mid-twentieth-century jazz culture […] where the word 'cool' figured as part of an in-group lexicon that was to develop into a popular argot that would be adopted increasingly by whites, eventually spreading from the dissident margins into the mainstream of youth culture […] African American culture is crucial […] for the sentiments associated with cool (p.4).

[37] Jim McGuigan, *Cool Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2009), p.1.

Whilst physical symbols, such as dreadlocks and sneakers, are associated with resistance and counter culture, on Carter they are merely symbols of capitalism's ability to monetise and neutralise resistance, representative of the wider history of black suppression and exploitation within the United States. Whereas the context of Carter's cultural aesthetic – dreadlocks are often associated with musical icons such as Bob Marley and trainers with rap culture - was once rooted in political black musical expression, the articles themselves are empty commodities in this context of capitalist cultural appropriation.

Central to Carter's cool persona, and his justification of his position as a white man within the black music industry, is his in-depth knowledge of the music's history. Carter argues that he 'live[s]' and 'feel[s]' the music and it is this that sets him apart from artists like 'MC Snowy Snow'[38] who just want to 'swan in and buy it off the shelf' (p.31). He presents his own fetishisation of black music as more authentic because he 'knows the tradition' (p.61), believing this protects him against claims of appropriation and 'bought [them] something, some right to blackness' (p.18). Carter presents himself as a connoisseur of black music, as someone who understands the 'authentic' black experience, rather than 'Vanilla Ice' (p.54) style pretenders who think 'James Brown dance moves' and 'breaking, pop and lock' are definitive of black culture (p.29). Much like Pran in *The Impressionist*, Carter's route to authenticity is through knowledge, yet the more they present themselves as authentic, the less authentic they appear; 'We worshipped music like Perry's but we knew we didn't own it, a fact we tried to ignore as far as possible, masking our disabling caucasity with a sort of professorial knowledge' (p.17). In the same way that Pran's relationship with the Major symbolises the Empire's civilising mission in *The Impressionist*, where British occupation and exploitation was portrayed as an attempt to educate and save the people of the colonies, Carter presents his obsession with owning black music, specifically music which speaks to

[38] Kunzru, *White Tears*, p.54.

black pain, as an attempt to preserve it, belying the exploitative and disturbing undercurrents of this desire.

There are other interesting parallels to *The Impressionist* here as well. Seth and Carter believe their knowledge and affinity for black music makes them arbiters of racial authenticity and they find themselves deeply unsatisfied by the ways in which the students surrounding them perform their blackness:

> The actual black kids at our school, of whom there were very few, seemed to us unsatisfactorily preppy or Christian or were basketball jocks doing business degrees […] It seemed unfair. We were the ones who wanted to be at a soundclash in Kingston (p.17).

The only black student they approve of is 'a Nigerian called Ade', who had 'short dreads', and 'smoked a lot of Carter's weed' (p.18). Echoing the sentiments of *The Impressionist*, the racial identity markers that are considered authentic here are in fact tokenistic and superficial. Seth and Carter are disappointed with the black students at their school because they are middle-class black students who are studious and religious, their backgrounds mirroring their suburban American upbringings rather than those of the reggae singers Seth and Carter admire. Cashmore argues that 'whites respond not to black people, but to the representations of black people' and in this sense, Seth and Carter are disappointed that their black peers do not adhere to the racial stereotypes they expect them to.[39] In contrast, they are satisfied with Ade's performance of blackness as he sports dreads, smokes weed and crucially does not make his blackness political; he refuses to pass comment on police brutality, to speak to the lived experience of being black in America and, as such, functions as a neutralised

[39] Cashmore, p.144.

stereotypes that does not require them to interrogate their own position within this exploitative framework. This idea is echoed in *The Impressionist* where notions of non-white racial identity and authenticity are in large part constructed through the white gaze. In the same way that Pran's perception of, and anxiety about, blackness is defined by colonial ideas of 'native' people, Seth and Carter's judgement of the authenticity of blackness again raises the question of how far notions of blackness and race are defined by others, specifically white people.

As Carter's obsession with black music escalates it becomes clear that his primary concern is ownership, not knowledge or admiration. This escalation in Carter's obsession is mirrored by a loosening grip on reality, mimicking the novel's parallel story of JumpJim and Chester Bly set in the 1950s. In a story that mirrors that of Seth and Carter, Chester and JumpJim meet in New York and bond over their blues collecting hobby. Embarking upon a tour of the south during the civil rights era, this hobby quickly turns into a cannibalistic obsession, as they trick and exploit poor black families in their quest to obtain rare records, following a rumour about a copy of Charlie Shaw's *Graveyard Blues* that results in Bly's downfall. As Carter slips further away from his friendship with Seth into the world of record collecting, his obsession becomes all consuming; when denied the records he wants 'he would scream at the screen' and he starts to think of them as something he '*needed*', rather than something he wants.[40] After they finish work on the Charlie Shaw track, Carter exclaims 'So who's the expert now? Who knows the tradition? We do! We own that shit!' (p.61). In this sense, cultural appropriation reflects a deeper, more sinister desire, the unsettling need for white men to own blackness. The obsession with the Charlie Shaw track is about a mastery of the tradition, of the black man, an act of dominance and subjugation that mirrors the Major's rape of Pran. Throughout the text Kunzru draws attention back to the ways in

[40] Kunzru, *White Tears*, p.26.

which Carter's family, emblematic of the privileged, white patriarchy, have continued their tradition of subjugating black men, whether that be working within the plantation fields or within the prison system, both of which Carter's family have links to. Kunzru consistently draws links between Carter's, and Chester's, 'need' to own black music and the longer history of the exploitative relationship between white and black men throughout American history.

Kunzru uses time here as a narrative technique; just as the time period of *The Impressionist* was used to historicise attitudes towards racial mixing and difference so too does the fluctuating time period of *White Tears*. The novel's timeline spans the mid-twentieth century to the present day, highlighting the longevity of this exploitative relationship, but also the ways in which history repeats itself, the exploitation of black people manifesting in differing ways as time progresses. Carter's obsession with records is foreshadowed by Chester Bly's story and his fate. The journey Seth and Leonie take through the South, in a bid to right the wrongs of their appropriation, is foreshadowed by Chester and JumpJim's record collecting journey through the South in search of Charlie Shaw's *Graveyard Blues*. The brutality of the fields, the prison system and Seth's treatment at the hands of the police - in the surreal moment when, suspected of Leonie's murder, Seth's body is invaded by the spirit of Charlie Shaw and he is subject to the racist violence black men experience at the hands of the police - all echo the police brutality of the contemporary moment. In their hotel room Leonie and Seth watch footage of an unarmed black man shot by police – 'Why would they kill him, she asks. His hands were up' – that echoes the 2014 police shooting of Michael Brown (p.145). When the police take Seth/Charlie Shaw into custody they roughly push him to the floor – 'There is a knee on my neck. I can't breathe' – that echoes the 2014 death of Eric Garner in police custody (p.187). Carter's fetishisation of the blues, and the parasitical relationship it suggests, is a contemporary manifestation of a system that has historically

mined and devalued black lives; 'We have always been here but it has taught us nothing. We still don't know what we have forgotten, what it is we owe' (p.172).

Kunzru exposes that an obsession with black culture and music, as is manifest through Seth and JumpJim, involves a strategic and determined ignorance of the history and context in which the blues originated. Throughout the text, numerous references are made to the ways in which they attempt to justify their role within a system that continues to oppress black people in America. When Seth first begins his listening journey, he wishes that the music 'could float free of all context, cocooned in the reassurance that yesterday was long gone, or perhaps never existed at all' (p.8). When he first listens to Charlie Shaw's *Graveyard Blues*, his instinct is to 'cover [his] ears, to unhear what [he] was hearing' and delete it (p.14). Similarly, during their record collecting trip in the South, in the midst of the civil rights movement, JumpJim attempts to justify his lack of participation by claiming he 'believed in civil rights' but didn't think 'handing out flyers and signing petitions [seemed] to make much difference' (p.139).

> Sure, I spent all my time listening to the blues, but one of the reasons I liked those old songs, those disembodied voices rising up out of the past, was because they were a refuge from the world. I didn't want them contaminated by current affairs (p.139).

Seth and JumpJim are aware, on a certain level, that there is a need to reconcile their love of black music with their unwillingness to try and affect any change regarding the position of black people in society. Their enjoyment relies upon a strategic ignorance of the social context in which the music was made and to which it makes reference. Seth's instinct to cover his ears reflects an inability to cope with the depth of feeling audible in Charlie Shaw's voice and his own sense of culpability; he would rather delete the track and attempt to forget

it, rather than acknowledge his participation within this system of abuse. JumpJim's enjoyment of the music is predicated on his strategic forgetting; his continued enjoyment of the blues relies on the artists remaining 'disembodied' and 'uncontaminated', regardless of the fact that the blues songs he so admires are inextricable from their context. For him, the blues is a source of pleasure, rather than a source of black pain and anger and, selfishly, he priorities his own needs to the detriment of those creating his 'refuge'. Carter and Chester's 'need' for possession is presented as explicitly fetishising and consumptive, yet Seth and JumpJim's determined ignorance is equally sinister; they want the culture without the context.

It becomes apparent that being able to 'narrate' a history of black music, knowing its traditions, following niche and forgotten artists and sounds, is not the same thing as understanding it. The commodified markers of authenticity and black identity that Carter and Seth apportion meaning to – music genres, vinyl records, and clothes – are presented as empty symbols of consumerism, whereas the lived aspects of black experience – police brutality, the incarceration of black men – are studiously ignored. Towards the end of the novel, in a narrative that becomes a ghost story of revenge, as punishment Seth is forced to become Charlie Shaw, forced to experience all the things he had ignored. As his transformation into Charlie Shaw deepens, he is by turns an innocent black man subjected to police brutality, a stereotypical, wolf like figure of the animalistic black man and a garish, unhinged minstrel figure – a hybrid creature created from a mixture of the lived experience of black people in America and racist stereotypes. Whilst Kunzru initially parodies Seth and Carter's cultural appropriation through humour, describing their 'disabling caucasity', the novel reveals a much darker aspect to the fervour with which these young white men obsess over, fetishise and appropriate black culture (p.17). Carter, his wealth and his need to possess things, is representative of the ways in which black culture, any counter-culture more

generally, is monetised and thereby neutralised, within the system of cool capitalism. Seth and JumpJim are representative of the ways in which middle-class white people are enthusiastic about black culture, yet reticent to address any of the societal issues it represents or interrogate how their consumption of it functions within this system of oppression and exploitation.

Considering *The Impressionist* alongside *White Tears* illustrates a continuous, global colonisation of non-whiteness. Just as *White Teeth* details the ways in which multiculturalism signalled a shift from explicit racism into more implicit forms, *White Tears* illustrates the shift from imperialist colonisation to more orientalist, consumptive forms of cultural appropriation. Kunzru's references to slavery, the over-representation of black men within the prison system and profiteering from the talent of black people within the music industry tracks a similar shift from overt exploitation to more implicit forms, indicating that whilst the format has changed, the system and framework that enabled this exploitation retains its power. Pran's mixed-race hybridity disrupts notions of racial and cultural authenticity, drawing attention to the damage that notions of authenticity continue to inflict upon non-white people, those for whom authenticity is required. Seth and Carter's attempts to develop a transcultural hybridity illustrates the term's meaningless in a contemporary context where it is a term that 'can be manipulated and used to convince people they are getting something profound when they are just getting merchandise'.[41] Both iterations reflect an unsettling, consumptive desire amongst white people for otherness.

Kunzru's novel highlights the ways that notions of authenticity are constructed by white people and corporations. These notions of authenticity then contribute to a capitalist system that mines black culture for the financial gain of white people and the continued control and exploitation of black people; a cultural marketplace which, when it 'looks for

[41] Cashmore, p.128.

cool [looks] to black culture', whilst still marginalising it.[42] Hutnyk and Kalra argue that neither discourses of authenticity and appropriation 'can exist without each other, as there has to be – even in denial - a discourse around the authenticity of a certain object before it can be subject to appropriation'.[43] I would argue that Kunzru's articulation of authenticity is in line with Cashmore's view of authenticity as a marketing tool, as what Seth and Carter appropriate are ideas about blackness connected to clothing and music, things that can be brought and owned. Similarly, Pran's adopted British identity is based on mannerisms and stereotypical British pursuits, suggesting that what is being appropriated in these novels, and in wider narratives of cultural appropriation, is the idea of authenticity, of something that is homogeneous and tangible and, as such, can be appropriated and replicated. Whilst Kunzru does seem to suggest that there is there is sense of a lived black experience – the history of slavery, police brutality and oppression – all of the peripheral black characters he presents are antithetical to the common perception of black people. They are middle class, liberal arts students or people who prefer the soft crooning of Sam Cooke to that of obscure blues artists, reflecting a plurality of black experience, as well as the history of black oppression. Outside of Charlie Shaw, black characters exist in brief references within the text, reflecting the relevance of actual narratives of blackness to dominant white narratives of black 'authenticity'. The interdependency of authenticity and appropriation is apparent in Kunzru's text, yet what is most significant is the ways in which the novel presents both models as primarily white constructs and domains.

[42] Dagbovie, *Crossing B(l)ack*, p.11.
[43] Virinder S. Kalra and John Hutnyk, 'Brimful of agitation, authenticity and appropriation: Madonna's 'Asian Kool'', *Postcolonial Studies: Culture, Politics and Economy*, 1:3 (1998), 399 – 355, (p.345).

HARI KUNZRU: THE MIXED-RACE AUTHOR AS DISRUPTIVE

Kunzru's authorial persona interestingly problematises some of the statements he is making within his novels regarding authenticity, racial identity and appropriation. Kunzru's journey to literary fame closely mirrored that of Zadie Smith's: he was allegedly offered a £1.25m book deal based on the early drafts of *The Impressionist* and he also featured on the 2003 Granta Best British Novelists list.[44] From the very beginning, Kunzru was presented as a cool figure; numerous profiles refer to Kunzru as a 'hip' or 'an urban warrior' (ibid), kick-starting each morning with 'espresso' and surrounded by 'street noise'.[45] Again, like Smith, attention was paid to his Oxford education and mixed-race background, with profiles referring to his parents' marriage as a 'controversial union', suggesting a tantalising clash of two cultures.[46] Markers of cool, such as an urban environment, an affinity with technology, and his start at 'ultra-hip techno magazine Wired', combined with the exoticism and perception of mixedness as 'hip' at the start of century, all coalesced to create the sense that Kunzru was on the pulse of the contemporary moment (ibid).

When Kunzru emerged into the literary marketplace it was at the height of a period of 'Asian Cool', an era during the early noughties when Asian music, literature and television was experiencing a cultural moment.[47] Hutnyk and Kalra describe this moment as one in which 'cultural products were rebranded as Asian Kool and people (sometimes) rebranded

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[44] Rachel Cooke, ''I'm the bloke who got the big advance'', *The Guardian*, 16 May 2004 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/may/16/fiction.features3> [accessed 24 January 2019].
[45] Hari Kunzru, 'Hari Kunzru: 'Espresso is all that stands between us and creative defeat'', *The Guardian*, 13 May 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/may/13/hari-kunzru-my-writing-day> [accessed 24 January 2019].
[46] Cooke, "I'm the bloke who got the big advance".
[47] Kundnani, p.52.

from Pakis, and other slurs, to applaud participants in national creativity and British ingenuity'.[48] Kunzru's hip urbanity and his mixed-race Asian background made him a key figure within this 'Asian Kool' movement. This movement suggested Britain itself was in the midst of a cool, multicultural revolution whilst still only (sometimes) allowing (certain) people – i.e. palatable figures like Kunzru and Monica Ali, whose raciality was mediated by class privilege and elite educations – to benefit from its newfound pretence of openness.

This sense of coolness has increased across Kunzru's career, where his authorial profile has retained its currency and relevance. His website – where he writes about literature alongside politics and discussions about climate change - and regular contributions to online media, as well as through the innovative approach he has taken to writing fiction, has ensured his contemporaneity and his standing as a culturally authoritative, hip-intellectual figure. In 2013 he published a book of fiction called *Memory Palace* that combined his words with the work of illustrators and graphic designers for London's Victoria and Albert Museum, a hybrid work that exists as both an art object and a work of fiction. In 2014 he published *Twice Upon a Time: Listening to New York*, that again was a hybrid object of both fiction and a digital audio app, in which the reader listened to the sounds Kunzru recorded of New York as they read his prose. Kunzru's literary utilisation of notions of hybridity is also reflected in the form of his work, which functions as both an art and technology experiment and has ensured that Kunzru remains one of Britain's coolest exports.

Kunzru's *Twice Upon a Time* is particularly interesting when thinking about the questions of authenticity that are raised by *White Tears*. *Twice Upon a Time* is a work that Kunzru created after his move to Manhattan in 2008 – a transatlantic base in New York forming another key requisite for a cool British novelist - as he

[48] Hutnyk and Kalra, p.340.

> sought a spiritual "guide" through the heady and sometimes overwhelming environment of his new home. The figure Kunzru chose was the legendary avant-garde musician and inventor Moondog (1916–99), whose idiosyncratic "snaketime" compositions brought luminaries like Charlie Parker and Philip Glass into his orbit.[49]

In order to construct *Twice Upon a Time* Kunzru made sound recordings of different parts of the city, a project which is echoed by Seth in *White Tears* and forms the original source recording of the *Graveyard Blues* that catalyses their downfall. Again, in a similar vein to that of his protagonist, it is at this point that Kunzru's own fascination with blues was ignited. Timed to compliment the publication of *White Tears* in early 2017, Kunzru wrote an article for *The Guardian* entitled 'The blues still stand for authenticity: my Mississippi road trip', in which he talks about his own journey through the South visiting places of historic significance in relation to the history of the blues.[50] The article is reminiscent of the section of the novel that describes Chester Bly's and JumpJim's journey through the South, pretending to be religious men in order to trick black people into giving up ownership of their blues records to satisfy the 'avaricious' greed of two white men.[51] This section of the novel details the records they collect as they travel through the South - 'We found Columbia 14299, Barbecue Bob "Motherless Chile Blues" / "Thinkin' Funny Blues" and Victor 21076 Luke Jordan "Church Bell Blues" / "Cocaine Blues"' - which is mirrored in Kunzru's retelling of his own Southern journey (p.150).

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[49] Bill Tipper, 'Twice Upon a Time: Hari Kunzru', *Barnes and Noble Review*, 20 May 2014, <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/review/twice-upon-a-time-hari-kunzru> [accessed 30 January 2019].
[50] Hari Kunzru, 'The blues still stands for authenticity': my Mississippi road trip', *The Guardian*, 24 March 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/mar/24/the-blues-authenticity-mississippi-road-trip-hari-kunzru-music> [accessed 30 January 2019].
[51] Kunzru, *White Tears*, p.161.

> Rounders such as Johnson would hop freights if they had no money for a regular ticket. "I got to keep moving," he sings, "blues falling down like hail./ And the days keeps on worrying me, there's a hellhound on my trail."[52]

The similarity between Kunzru's own journey through America, and his fascination with blues music of the same era, is clearly apparent, yet Kunzru's journey is not positioned in the same way as Carter and Seth's. He presents his own appreciation of black music through the same authenticity mechanisms as Seth and Carter: he has a deep knowledge of the genre, an appreciation for the technology, and financial capital that has enabled his collection and exploration of the blues. Like Seth and Carter, Kunzru is wealthy, privileged, lives in a hip part of New York and has had access to an elite education.

Whereas the text ridicules and condemns Seth and Carter for their cultural appropriation, Kunzru has so far eluded any similar accusations. *The Washington Post* review of the novel, describes Kunzru as a writer who is 'exquisitely attuned to his material'[53] and the *LA Review of Books* praises Kunzru's 'razor-sharp insights'.[54] Kunzru talked about his novel as a project interested in 'the white taste for the authentic', alongside the 'symbiotic', 'gray areas' of the history of the Blues, where white collectors were often responsible for

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[52] Kunzru, 'The blues still stands for authenticity'.
[53] Katharine Weber, 'White Tears,' by Hari Kunzru, hears the distorted sounds of the past', *The Washington Post*, 9 March 2017 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/white-tears-by-hari-kunzru-hears-the-distorted-sounds-of-the-past/2017/03/08/863c65ce-044e-11e7-b9fa-ed727b644a0b_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.dd916661c8fe> [accessed 30 January 2019].
[54] Leah Mirakhor, 'The Terror of White Innocence: A Review of Hari Kunzru's "White Tears"', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 5 April 2017 <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/white-innocencewhite-terror-in-hari-kunzrus-white-tears/#!> [accessed 30 January 2019].

preserving old records that would have otherwise been lost to history.[55] An examination of whiteness is a recurring theme throughout his work, and his commentary on white cultural appropriation in *White Tears* is incisive as reviewers have noted. There are two factors about Kunzru's positioning here that are interesting in relation to notions of authenticity. Firstly, although Kunzru shares a hobby with his protagonists, his own journey through the South in search of the blues is not read as exploitative or appropriative, in the same vein as his white protagonists. Secondly, although this symbiotic relationship between white people and black culture is very specifically tied to an African-American context in relation to the blues, whilst Kunzru now lives in New York, he is still a cultural outsider, yet he is granted authoritative status, the freedom to take the blues – and within that the history of black exploitation, expression and pain – as both subject and object without objection.

In this sense, Kunzru is himself implicated in these discourses of cultural appropriation – both in the act of consuming Blues culture himself and in profiting from a novel about black culture and issues of representation. He remains free of the condemnation he levies upon his protagonists, however, despite knowingly invoking these issues in a literary marketplace and cultural context in which 'such terms as 'marginality', 'authenticity' and 'resistance' circulate as commodities available for commercial exploitation'.[56] Does Kunzru's own racialised position contribute to this discrepancy? Within Kunzru's work, hybridity functions as a disruption of established frameworks of race; if we extend that analysis to encompass his authorial persona, then Kunzru's mixedness, his racial and cultural hybridity, mediates his position within these frameworks of cultural appropriation, functioning as a 'gray area' which disrupts narratives of authenticity and appropriation.

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[55] Hari Kunzru and Sjon, 'Hari Kunzru and Sjon', *Bomb Magazine*, 15 March 2017 <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/hari-kunzru-and-sj%C3%B3n/> [accessed 30 January 2019].
[56] Huggan, p.xvi.

In a review of the novel for the *London Review of Books*, Theo Tait argues that Kunzru uses the blues as space to discuss the ways in which ideas about authenticity that are attached to racial identity are retrospective and fictional; 'an invention of later white enthusiasts looking for a particular primitive thrill in their black music […] 'uncontaminated' black singing, not spoiled by the record companies and cities'.[57] Indeed, this critique is apparent in *White Tears* as JumpJim asks Seth if he knows what 'miscegenation means';

> You got the picture yet? It's a business. The record company needed to give it a certain spin. Salvatore Massaro had to be Blind Willie Dunn because that's the only way the product would sell. You and your buddy, mixing it up, trying to pull into the real like it's some kind of amplifier. You're the worst of them. Looking for that uncut hit. That pure. Fucking vampires! Why can't you accept there ain't no pure. There ain't no real. It's just people.[58]

Tait's argument is most apparent here, as Kunzru draws attention to the workings of the black culture industry in which authenticity is both a fallacy and a marketing tool, constructed by white record label owners in order to sell the blues to people like Carter and Chester, drawn in by the idea of an authentic black sound. Kunzru condemns Seth and Carter for their attempts to cannibalise and appropriate that sound and for their belief that a 'pure' sound, an authentic and definitive version of black identity, exists. It is significant that Kunzru has chosen to use the word 'miscegenation' as a way of encapsulating this concept, functioning here in a similar manner to *The Impressionist*, as a way of drawing attention to the

[57] Theo Tait, 'Three Minutes of Darkness', *London Review of Books*, 27 July 2017 <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v39/n15/theo-tait/three-minutes-of-darkness> [accessed 30 January 2019].
[58] Kunzru, *White Tears*, p.241.

arbitrariness and falsity of fixed boundaries and binary identities. In *The Impressionist*, the notion of fixed boundaries between the races and pure identities is revealed as a fiction promulgated by white men as a way of consolidating power during a time when Britain's hold on the Empire was fracturing. Similarly, in *White Tears*, notions of an authentic black sound and identity exist as a marketing tool, a mechanism that feeds into the romantic notions attached to the blues. In both instances, the illusion of purity and separation between races or sounds, is a fallacy and 'miscegenation' – in the sense of intermixture and interrelation - the reality.

Whilst it is clear that Kunzru's latest novel is exposing the ways in which ideas of authenticity attached to black culture are a further manipulation of black artists and white consumers, it does not reconcile Kunzru's own position within this narrative and the ways in which he both condemns, yet is implicated within, this system. *White Tears* functions as a vehicle for condemning white cultural appropriation, yet is also a knowingly 'hip', 'cool' novel about black culture that exploits the cool capital attached to black culture yet centres only white protagonists. Parts of his prose, both in the novel and in the articles written about his experience in the South, reveal a deep affinity with the history of the blues, attributes which, within the world of the novel, function as fetishisation. There is a sense in which Kunzru's position as a visibly racialised, mixed-race figure transcends racial borders. As such, to be racialised as non-white, blurs the boundaries of cultural appropriation; perhaps a commonality within the experience of racism and appropriation that transcends racial categories.

This sense of transcendence, of sitting outside established boundaries of race, has often been attributed to the mixed-race figure, regardless as to whether it has been presented as a damaging marginality or a post-racial fluidity. Kunzru, as an author and a cultural figure, utilises ideas about hybridity to disrupt and interrogate established notions of race,

authenticity and cultural appropriation. Ellis Cashmore argues that cultural authority 'derives in large part from […] presence'; when people 'make pronouncements on social or political affairs, the gravitas and credibility of some of their subjects would pass, as if by osmosis, to them.'[59] In this sense, perhaps Kunzru's willingness to explore contemporary notions of cultural appropriation, whilst also critiquing the privilege of whiteness - crucially as a non-white actor - confers cultural authority upon him.

Although Kunzru was brought up middle class, in the suburbs of Essex and with access to an elite education, he retains a sense of edgy, contemporary relevance. He has often commented upon the exclusion and marginality he felt within established sites of white privilege, which has perhaps mediated the privilege of his upbringing. He has referred to Oxford as ''toffworld' and criticised it as place where he was 'an exotic, a hit with girls from the Home Counties who were simply full of the Buddha of Suburbia.'[60] His time spent at private school before Oxford was mediated by his experiences of racism; 'We were all Pakis, and we were all greasy and smelly. My memory of school is that I could very rarely escape the fact of my greasiness and smelliness' (ibid). Although Kunzru has experienced the world as a privileged male, that privilege has been mediated by his racialised position and his disenchantment with the established world of white masculinity, legitimising his own position within these debates as a member of the oppressed minority.

In *Cool Capitalism*, McGuigan states that expressions of counter culture and rebellion that ostensibly challenged 'the dominant culture at its very heart', were instead incorporated back into mainstream culture in a way that 'effectively - and ironically - refreshed the culture and political economy of corporate America, thereby contributing to its survival and flourishing'.[61] Kunzru's disenchantment with the establishment, and his position as an

[59] Cashmore, p.131.
[60] Cooke, 'I'm the bloke who got the big advance'.
[61] McGuigan, p.6.

outsider, is incorporated into his marketing and author brand. His critique of the world of privilege he grew up in and his racial identity mediate his class identity in a way that allows him to benefit from upper middle-class, male privilege yet defines him outside of it. With the exception of his mixed-race heritage, every aspect of Kunzru's profile – his wealthy background, private education, Oxford degree – are all traditional markers of male privilege, reflecting the existing publishing system which disproportionately benefits middle class, male authors.

Ian Jack, the head of the 2003 *Granta* committee, commented in an article for the *New Statesman* that '60 per cent' of the authors included on the *Granta* list of Best of Young British Novelists in 2003 were Oxbridge educated, suggesting that 'writing novels requires confidence as well as intelligence and imagination' and that 'getting them published often requires connections. The two C's – see many other branches of our island life.'[62] Jack explicitly draws the comparison between wealth, the confidence to write and access to publication, a system of embedded privilege. Yet, much like Kunzru's own expressions of disenchantment with that system, Jack's comments pose no threat to the status quo, in the same way that his committee's *Granta* list did little to redress that balance. In this way, Kunzru's coolness is incorporated into a system aware of its lack of racial and class diversity, yet only ostensibly addressing it. In this sense, the attributes that distinguish Kunzru's profile from his white male counterparts are much more akin to the sense of neutralised radicalism embodied in the appropriated black culture consumed by Carter and Seth, than his own conceptualisation of the mixed-race figure as a radical subject position, a disruptive and regenerative force.

There is little dissent to the idea of Kunzru as an authentic, subversive cultural figure; the most prominent opposition voiced by Kunzru himself:

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[62] Ian Jack, 'Diary: Ian Jack', *New Statesman*, 13 January 2003, p.9.

> I think people fetishize authenticity and I think it can be a very toxic way of looking at the world. My joke about myself is that I'm the most inauthentic person I know, and I suppose my own racial history is part of that. I have an Indian father and an English mother, so I was never quite white enough or brown enough. But also, people are constantly searching for a kind of guarantee of their own authenticity, a sort of stamp of approval or a certificate. I think it's a very interesting exercise to go against that, to think about what the value of inauthenticity is.[63]

It is interesting here that Kunzru associates the idea of inauthenticity with his own mixed race. Both *The Impressionist* and *White Tears* consistently point out the fallacy of an authentic racial identity; the harder Pran works towards presenting an authentic white, British identity, the less substantial his own sense of self becomes. Pran's ability to pass as a white British man, to transform into all of his various iterations, suggest mutability rather than rootedness and stability. If we define authenticity as something that is fixed and stable, then the mixed-race figure is an inauthentic one. It is this inauthenticity that disrupts contemporary meanings of the word, as well as established narratives of race and nation, illustrating that these are unstable and insubstantial notions upon which to construct a sense of personal and national identity.

In contrast to Kunzru's statement, however, notions of authenticity have 'circulated as a commodity' in the marketing and promotion of Kunzru's novels. In a review of *The Impressionist* featured in trade publication *Publishers Weekly*, Penguin president Carole Baron advised booksellers to market the novel based on the idea of Kunzru as an authentic

[63] Eleanor Wachtel, 'Hari Kunzru on race, politics and the blues', *CBC Radio*, 12 March 2017 <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/writersandcompany/hari-kunzru-on-race-politics-and-the-blues-1.4012283> [accessed 30 January 2019].

figure, an insider; 'he also gives you a view of this world that there's no way somebody like me would have ever known about, not only the time or the place'.[64] Here the idea of 'somebody like me' is coded as white and Kunzru is presented as a racial insider, uniquely positioned to reveal the world of Britain's ethnic minorities, a common presentation of non-white authors within the literary marketplace as this thesis illustrates. Kunzru's novel is presented as a text that reveals a hidden history and time, even though that history is available to anyone willing to look for it. Baron's attitude is emblematic of the stereotypical white British approach to history, which neglects the voices of its non-white population and expects this history to be revealed to them. Much like attitudes towards the texts of Zadie Smith and Monica Ali, Kunzru is read as a cultural and racial insider. Baron's review of the novel, transparently put forth as a sales tip, highlights the ways in which Kunzru, and non-white authors more broadly, are sold to the marketplace based on the idea that they are culturally and racially authentic and authoritative, regardless of the fact that often the texts themselves challenge that very tenet.

[64] 'Hari Kunzru: The Impressionist', *Publishers Weekly*, 28 January 2002.

3. MIXED-RACE AUTHENTICITY: MONICA ALI

Following the success of *White Teeth* and *The Impressionist,* and capitalising on the rise of 'Asian Cool', publishers were keen to exploit the trend for non-white, multicultural authors. Doubleday, the publishers of Monica Ali's 2003 bestseller *Brick Lane*, were no exception. Upon receipt of Ali's speculative manuscript, editors at Doubleday were quick to offer Ali a £200,000 two book publishing deal, excited by the 'right up to minute' contemporaneity of the novel:

> Monica Ali has GOT IT. You can't be more NOW, more Zadie Smith-ish, than a novel set in the Bangladeshi immigrant community in Tower Hamlets. It's got everything: life in a small rural village in Bangladesh, immigrants in nasty sink estates in East London, arranged marriages, the adjustments and compromises that immigrants need to make.[1]

It was not only the content of the novel that the publishers identified as being marketable within the current literary marketplace, but Ali herself:

> Not only is she so talented, she is also incredibly promotable. Monica herself is 34 years old, and has a Bangladeshi father and a British mother. She grew up in Birmingham and went to Oxford. She's incredibly bright, lovely looking and very cool […] So what is it about the book that is causing all this tremor of nerves and excitement? It started with Hanif Kureishi's Buddha of Suburbia, then there was

[1] Archive document from Penguin Random House archives (Rushden, Northamptonshire) [accessed 4 September 2017].

> Meera Syal's Anita and Me and Life Isn't All Ha Ha He He, then came Zadie Smith's White Teeth. […] Now Monica Ali brings this British Asian scenario bang up to date with BL, a book that looks at Asian lives in the East End, even taking things to what happened after Sept 11th (ibid).

The statements above encapsulate the appeal of *Brick Lane*, and the appetite for non-white fiction – both in terms of author and protagonists - within the publishing industry in that particular contemporary moment. The second statement is taken from a speech promoting the novel to publishing industry insiders and booksellers, demonstrating that, whilst the contemporaneity and provocative aspects of the novel's plot are a selling point, it is the marketability of Ali's profile that invokes the greatest sense of excitement. Her mixed-race background, elite education, physical appearance, the ubiquitous notion of coolness attached to non-white cultural producers and the ways in which Ali's profile easily integrates within the emergent genre of multicultural fiction, typified by what Michael Perfect has termed the 'multicultural bildungsroman', are central to her appeal.[2] Ali's profile fits the model of the multicultural, specifically mixed-race author, that Smith and Kunzru had already proven was popular. It is clear from the comments, however, that this strategy of viewing authors as types encourages an approach that relies on generalisations and stereotypes, rather than one which pays attention to nuance and difference. This short-sightedness is illustrated by the mistake Ali's own publishing house makes regarding her background – she was brought up in Bolton, rather than Birmingham as stated – an error which makes it clear that the marketability of Ali's profile is premised on what she represents, rather than who she really is.

[2] Michael Perfect, 'The Multicultural Bildungsroman: Stereotypes in Monica Ali's Brick Lane', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 43:3 (2008), 109 – 120.

The comments above encompass many aspects of publishing culture within the early noughties that this thesis, and this chapter, are interested in considering; the extent to which 'multicultural' mixed-race authors became a trending commodity, the values and ideologies attached to them, the marketability of mixed-race and the extent to which the success of novels like *Brick Lane* were predicated upon the racialised personae of their authors. This chapter will focus on the ways in which Monica Ali's racial identity was framed throughout the pre-publication hype, publication and subsequent film adaptation of her 2003 debut novel *Brick Lane*, considering the ways in which Ali's British-Asian mixed-race identity was framed and centralised in promotion of the novel. Whereas the previous chapter explored the ways in which Kunzru's work and profile interrogated and disrupted notions of authenticity, this chapter is interested in the ways in which Ali's mixed-race identity became embroiled in debates about racial and ethnic authenticity, wielded as proof of her inauthenticity. Ali's racial identity was frequently invoked in arguments that accused her of cultural appropriation and inauthentic representation of the East London Bangladeshi community, critiques that identified her mixed race as the location of her inauthenticity. Whilst many scholars have examined the burden of authenticity specifically placed upon Ali and her novel – Virginia Richter, Dave Gunning and Michael Perfect to name a few – this chapter will be the first to explicitly examine the ways in which Ali's mixed-race identity functions within this framework of authenticity.

PRE-PUBLICATION POSITIONING

Mirroring the pre-publication hype of *White Teeth* and *The Impressionist*, Monica Ali's status as the next in line to Smith's success was established months before the publication of her debut novel *Brick Lane*. The same mythology of success that circulated around Zadie Smith

and Hari Kunzru – large advances, youth, coolness, bidding wars – surrounded Ali as her book was purchased on the strength of 'only a few chapters' of *Brick Lane*.[3] Before the novel was published, Ali's position as an important literary figure was established with her inclusion on the 2003 Granta Best of Young British Novelists list, a list which also featured Zadie Smith and Hari Kunzru. As the novel had yet to be published, there was little material with which to promote the novel; in response to this challenge Ali's publishers positioned her within the market through circuits of authentication, marketing her through comparison to established authors whose work ostensibly expressed similar contents and concerns. *The Guardian* review of the Granta list introduced Ali by quoting Doubleday's summary of the novel as 'Shades of *The Death of Vishnu* [written by Manil Suri], possibly Zadie Smith and a dash of Arundhati Roy'.[4] These comparisons connect Ali to a sense of a South Asian literary tradition, and the growing oeuvre of British multicultural fiction established by the success of Zadie Smith, yet it is unclear from this summary whether *Brick Lane* is being positioned as similar in tone to the work of those authors or whether Ali racial identity is being positioned by association with the racial identities of those authors.

These comparisons actively positioned Ali within the marketplace by suggesting connections on the reader's behalf which, in turn, conflated key differences between the authors and works listed. This strategy of comparison encourages a continued slippage between text and author that foregrounds the racial identity of the author and makes it difficult to separate Ali's racial identity from an interpretation of her text. In his seminal study, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, Graham Huggan has termed this marketing strategy 'interethnic endorsement' which he argues is a 'paratextual by-product of a market-model of

[3] Harriet Lane, 'Ali's in Wonderland'.
[4] Sunder Katwala and Jana Ciglerova, 'The class of 2003', *The Guardian*, 5 January 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/jan/05/fiction.features1> [accessed 7 January 2016].

authenticity, one of whose effects […] is to posit the interchangeability of 'exotic' cultures and cultural goods'.[5] Endorsing Ali through association with South Asian authors and Smith conflates her racial identity with a generalised sense of Indian-ness/non-whiteness that locates her outside of a normative [white] sense of Britishness and fosters a sense of 'sameness', a lack of specificity, when considering non-white racial identity. Whilst Ali's publishers may have intended to use the comparison to Roy as a way to profit from the cultural capital attached to winning the Booker prize, the fact that both Roy and Suri are authors of Indian descent, whose novels are set in India, seems in danger of interchanging the 'exotic' locales of India and Bangladesh. It also belies the central London setting of *Brick Lane* and Ali's own British nationality. Benwell, Procter and Robinson claim that *Brick Lane*'s 'popularity was […] premised on its difference'; I argue more specifically, however, that it was premised on its difference to white British culture as the comparisons to Roy, Sunil and Smith elides, and is little concerned with, the differences between the cultures and contexts that those texts and authors invoke.[6]

Reviewers of the Granta list seemed to identify the eagerness to compare Ali to other non-white authors as problematic; in her overview of the Granta top 20 list, Geraldine Bedell stated that it would be 'unfair to call her [Ali] 'the new Zadie Smith', though people will try'.[7] Even though this ostensibly refutes the comparison, it still succeeds in framing Monica Ali in comparison to Smith without identifying why this might be problematic. Similarly, Katwala and Ciglerova's overview of the Granta top 20 acknowledges that Doubleday's comparisons to Smith, Roy and Suri 'suggest that her greatest challenge may be to stake out a claim to

[5] Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, p.170.
[6] Bethan Benwell, James Procter and Gemma Robinson, 'Not Reading Brick Lane', *New Formations*, No. 73 (January 2011), 90 - 116 (p.100).
[7] Geraldine Bedell, 'The Granta list 2003', *The Guardian*, 5 January 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/jan/05/fiction.features> [accessed 7 January 2016].

define her own voice', yet Ali is one of only four authors included in the article whose profile does not feature an 'in their own words' section.[8] Their article details Rachel Cusk's thoughts on literary fame, A. L. Kennedy's reflections on the psychology of her writing and Hari Kunzru's response to being labelled the new Zadie Smith in a section titled 'in their own words', yet Ali's summary is limited to the 'what others say' section. Although Katwala and Ciglerova acknowledge the necessity for Ali to define her own voice, the reader is still left to define Ali through the voices provided. Before anyone had read the novel, Ali's place within the literary marketplace, and her status as an 'ethnic' author, had been established through these circuits of authentication that endorse, but also condition, the positioning of Ali's racial identity and the lens through which her text is interpreted.

From the outset the narrative constructed around *Brick Lane*'s publication was inextricably bound to that of Zadie Smith. As demonstrated by the excerpts at the beginning of this chapter, a significant amount of Ali's appeal to her publishers centred on the potential for connection between the two. Journalists were quick to make this connection too, commenting on the differences in their physicality and presence;

> She is a marketing man's dream. Half Bangladeshi, half English, she's undeniably beautiful, but in a thirty something way, without the razor sharp, threatening glamour of Zadie Smith.[9]

> Despite comparisons with White Teeth author Zadie – Granta included them both on its best young authors lists – Monica doesn't appear to share Zadie's confidence

[8] Katwala and Ciglerova, 'The class of 2003'.
[9] Sarah Oliver, 'Which writer refused to speak to [*sic*] they sent a white interviewer – Meet Monica Ali, the 'half'n'half', *Mail on Sunday*, 8 June 2003, p.56.

(arrogance some might say).[10]

The continued and widespread insistence upon linking Smith and Ali's names illustrates important issues in regard to the status of minority authors within the publishing and media industry. There are indeed similarities between the two; both authors are Oxbridge educated young women who grew up in interracial families and, in this sense, the differences between them – Ali's South Asian heritage, her northern upbringing, her private school education – are negated. Zadie Smith's award-winning marketing campaign illustrated the value of ethnicity as 'a form of symbolic capital that sells' and set a clear precedent for Ali's publicity campaign to follow.[11]

It is significant that although repeated connections between the two authors are drawn, they are also positioned against each other. Ali is presented as the less 'threatening' option to Smith, a more agreeable and less 'arrogant' option, a characterisation that is tied into discourses of race that present blackness as threatening and echoes 'angry black woman' stereotypes. In contrast, Ali is presented as the more amiable option, demure and non-threatening, aligned with the 'South Asian model minority' that presents South Asian women as more submissive, adhering to the 'good immigrant' sentimentality that expects gratitude and compliance from Britain's minorities.[12] This reflects the tendency in social discourse to present South Asian, stereotypically Indian, communities as model minorities keen to assimilate and work their way up in British society in contrast to black British communities that have historically been represented as a threat to society through depictions of black violence, drug use and street culture. Smith is invoked as a shorthand authentication of type –

[10] 'Monica Ali', *Daily Express*, 4 June 2003.
[11] Bethan Benwell and James Procter, *Reading Across Worlds: Transnational Book Groups and the Reception of Difference* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.144.
[12] Jasbir K. Puar and Amit Rai, 'The Remaking of a Model Minority: Perverse Projectiles under the Specter of (Counter)Terrorism', *Social Text*, 22:3 (Fall 2004), 75 – 104 (p.79).

mixed race, multicultural, young, attractive – yet when that comparison is extended it highlights the problematic racialised discourses underpinning the contrast of the two writers, where blackness remains unstable and threatening.

It is clear from these discourses that the figure of the literary celebrity – a figure whose opinion is authoritative, consecrated by the institution of the British literary canon - wields cultural power. As cultural figures, Ali and Smith provide a space for a renegotiation of narratives of race, a reconsideration of what constitutes British literature which so often functions as a marker of national identity. This potential is alluded to in the use of Smith's name to discuss what it means to be mixed race in Britain and articles that address the injustice of the 'burden of representation' placed on ethnic authors: a potential that is denied by comparisons which tend towards homogenising difference or perpetuating racialised stereotypes.[13] Kavita Bhanot argues that the 'mainstream, unable to engage with the specificity and diversity of the 'other', seeks to manage diversity by homogenising it'.[14] It is evidently easier to incorporate both authors within a homogenised sense of 'ethnic' authorship, or encompass them within established discourses of race, then engage with the nuanced complexity and specificity demanded by the mixed-race figure.

'MIXED' REVIEWS

In her article, 'The Crest of the Wave', Danielle Fuller argues that the public and critical response to contemporary bestsellers reveals 'the cultural politics and political economy of

[13] George Aligiah, 'Viewpoint: What it's like to be mixed-race in Britain', *BBC News*, 2 October 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-15019672> [accessed 30 January 2016]; Fareena Alam, 'The burden of representation', *The Guardian*, 13 July 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/jul/13/fiction.features> [accessed 7 January 2016].
[14] Kavita Bhanot, 'Too Asian, Not Asian Enough', *Media Diversified*, 21 January 2015, <https://mediadiversified.org/2015/01/21/too-asian-not-asian-enough/> [accessed 7th March 2019].

publishing, notions of literary value, and the ideological function of representations' of a particular geographic locale.[15] This section of analysis aims to explore 'what anxieties and desires' are being played out in the published reviews and reader responses that circulated during the publication of *Brick Lane* (ibid).

Various discourses of mixed-race identity circulated in the media as the novel entered the literary marketplace. Media articles repeatedly made reference to the success of Zadie Smith and Hari Kunzru as epitomising 'an ethnic moment' in literature, where being a 'bi-racial author [was] very fashionable'.[16] Marina Budhos' article, entitled 'An Ethnic Tale of Girl Power', suggested that Smith and Ali's novels represented a new kind of 'mongrel fiction'.[17] The suggestion inherent within phrases such as 'ethnic moment', or within the presentation of these novels as a fashionable trend, is that the appeal and value of these novels is temporal, part of an emerging 'canonisation of the exotic novel' that is expressive of cultural attitudes of the time, rather than a representation of the cultural reality of the UK or the future of its literary output.[18] In doing so, it implies that Zadie Smith and Monica Ali are exceptions, a product of an unusual time of social change in the UK, rather than an indication of the continually changing demographics of Britain and a reflection of a population in which, 'by 2051, one in five people in the UK is predicted to be from an ethnic minority'.[19] References to Smith and Ali's work as the product of an 'ethnic moment' de-legitimises their work and denies them entrance into the established British canon.

Budhos' use of the outdated and offensive term 'mongrel' is echoed in an article published in the *Mail on Sunday* in June 2003, entitled 'Meet Monica Ali, the 'half'n'half',

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[15] Fuller, p.40.
[16] Sarah Oliver, 'Which writer refused to speak to they sent a white interviewer'.
[17] Marina Budhos, 'An ethnic tale of girl power', *LA Times*, 14 September 2003 <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/sep/14/books/bk-budhos14> [accessed 7 March 2019].
[18] Huggan, p.71.
[19] Kean, p.2.

the title of which alone is a startling indictment of the need to reassess the language in which mixed race is discussed within Britain. Sara Upstone has posited that 'identifying an author via ethnic categorisation is less about ethnicity per se than about an attitude which may come with this: a term 'ideological rather than geographical''.[20] In this sense, objectifying Ali as the 'half'n'half' is a worrying reflection of cultural attitudes towards mixed race in Britain at the start of the twenty-first century. Unlike the celebratory tone of multiculturalism that surrounded the publication of *White Teeth,* the rhetoric surrounding Ali's mixed race echoes the more overtly racist sentiments of the late 1980s, where the predominant terminology with which to refer to mixed-race individuals was 'half-caste', suggesting a backlash against the overtly celebratory reception of Smith's novel just three years earlier. Even the interviews which refrain from using explicitly racially coded language display worrying attitudes towards mixedness. *The Sunday Herald* journalist Peter Ross acknowledges the issues incumbent with identifying Ali as the 'new Zadie Smith', arguing that the comparison is 'rather patronising, perhaps even [a] low level racist term' that associates the authors based upon assumptive racial connections.[21] Ross states:

> It is reasonable that Ali would not want to be ghetto-ised as an Asian writer. She is, rather, a writer who is of Asian descent; her imagination is more important than her pigmentation. That said, *Brick Lane* is a novel with no white characters, and racial tension is a key theme (ibid).

The first part of his statement exhibits an understanding of the unfair burden of representation placed upon non-white authors and the desire to not be defined by the 'pigmentation' of one's

[20] Sara Upstone, *British Asian Fiction: Twenty-First Century Voices* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 6.
[21] Peter Ross, 'Brick Lane by Monica Ali', *The Sunday Herald* (1 June 2003).

skin. This understanding is undermined however by the suggestion that the lack of white protagonists and references to racial hostility within the book validates such 'ghettoisation' and the implication that the burden of representing non-white characters, and addressing issues of racism, are solely within the remit of non-white authors.

Ross later refers to Ali as 'an overnight success with 2000 years of stories to draw upon', as an author whose success was aided by 'an enviably rich heritage' and 'an Oxford graduate with a family tree full of beautiful magicians' (ibid), racially-coded references that turn Ali into an 'ethnic spectacle'.[22] These statements exoticise Ali and conflate the world of *Brick Lane* with that of her own racial background and experience; she is presented as a modern-day Scheherazade rather than a woman who spent her formative years in Bolton. Utilising Ana Maria Sanchez-Arce's theory of authenticism, Dave Gunning argues that:

> Within the structures of authenticism, it becomes quite possible for readers to accept the discrepancy between Ali's background and that of her characters but nonetheless to read the text as possessing, through Ali's ethnic ancestry, a particular value that is transmitted as authenticity. The world of the novel seems knowable, not necessarily because of the use of documentary realist style, but rather because of the identity of the figure through whom readers vicariously know the world described in the novel—the ethnically marked author.[23]

These references align Ali with an orientalist, Eastern stereotype in a similar vein to the way in which references to hip hop and streetwear indicated Smith's connection with blackness. If, as Upstone argues, exoticising language and ethnic stereotyping is 'ideological rather than

[22] Huggan, p.67.
[23] Dave Gunning, 'Ethnicity, Authenticity, and Empathy in the Realist Novel and its Alternatives', *Contemporary Literature*, 53:4 (Winter 2012), 779-813 (p.785).

geographical', the discourses circulated around Ali and *Brick Lane* suggest certain anxieties about the esoteric notion of mixed race and consolidate Ali's status as non-British and 'other', locating her within the ethnic community of the novel.[24]

Ali's racial identity was further implicated in the marketing of the novel following the rejection of an interview with *The Guardian* columnist Maya Jaggi. Ali, hyper conscious of the eagerness to compare her to Zadie Smith and interpret her within a framework of race, allegedly refused to grant her first interview to a British Asian journalist for fear of being pigeon holed as an Asian writer.

> The author "feels that black and Asian writers are often talked about and presented solely in terms of their race, whereas she would like to be seen as a writer who is naturally concerned about issues surrounding race, but who would also just like to be seen and judged as an interesting writer too". They helpfully suggested a substitute journalist, who, unlike me, is neither Asian nor a woman.[25]

Instead of moving Ali away from discourses of race, the response from Ali's publishers further implicated her within them. Jaggi's impassioned response drew closer attention to Ali's racial identity, as well as the ways in which the media and publishing industry was perpetuating racialised standards and re-entrenching ideas about the superiority of whiteness. There is a sense here of Jaggi's complicity within this system; whilst her offense is valid and she had the right to protest being denied the interview because of her racial identity, there is also a strategic refusal to acknowledge the validity of Ali's resistance and the nuance of the statement underlying it. Richter argues that books written by non-white authors are 'marked'

[24] Sara Upstone, *British Asian Fiction*, p.6.
[25] Maya Jaggi, 'Colour bind', *The Guardian*, 6 February 2003 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/feb/07/fiction.race> [accessed 7 March 2019].

and judged in accordance with a framework of race and authenticity that 'unmarked' white authors are not subject to.

> This is particularly the case with books written by women, writers from ethnic minorities, or Holocaust survivors. Works written by authors whose identity is 'unmarked' – by and large, white heterosexual men – tend to be evaluated according to their aesthetic merit. One reason is the symbolic invisibility of a position that is 'just' human.[26]

Ali's reported refusal can be reconciled within the frame of Richter's argument. There is a sense in which coverage by a female British Asian journalist predetermines the audience for Ali's novel and potentially limits its appeal to that of a non-white, female audience. Ali's preference for a white reviewer reflects a desire for her novel to enter the marketplace 'unmarked', as 'just' a human story rather than an ethnic one, to be judged on its aesthetic merit rather than its degree of authenticity. It seems unlikely that Jaggi, an experienced journalist, and one of few well-known non-white literary reviewers at the time, was not aware of the differing frameworks within which non-white and white authors were considered, perhaps utilising this opportunity to invoke her own form of 'staged marginality' and capitalise upon the controversy the incident provoked.[27] This interlude laid the foundation for the presentation of Ali as an inauthentic author, keen to distance herself from her own racial identity, yet exploiting a minority community to sell her books. The language surrounding Ali's mixed-race identity, and the controversy surrounding the rejection of Jaggi's interview

[26] Virginia Richter, 'Authenticity: Why We Still Need It Even Although It Doesn't Exist' in *Transcultural English Studies: Theories, Fictions, Realities* ed. by Frank Schulze-Engler and Sissy Helff, 59 – 74 (p.60).
[27] Huggan, p.xii.

request, illustrate the ways in which Ali's authorial persona and racial identity had become a contested space even before the novel was published.

PUBLICATION OF *BRICK LANE*, HARDBACK (2003) AND PAPERBACK (2004)

As a result of the pre-publication hype and media coverage, Ali's novel was implicated in contested, and contentious, discourses of race before copies were available on shelves. Benwell and Procter have argued that, as a result of the anticipatory hype and publicity, when *Brick Lane* was published in June 2003 its story came to the reader 'humming with meanings derived from the marketplace' as the first section of this chapter has shown.[28] The following section will explore the ways in which the paratexts of the hardback (2003) and paperback (2004) editions positioned the novel within the marketplace and the ways in which Ali's mixed-race identity was implicated in the framing of the text. Huggan argues that book covers are the reader's first introduction to the novel, setting up an 'initial horizon of readerly expectations that is subsequently confirmed or, more likely, modified in the narrative that follows'.[29] Much like the presentation of Ali in the narratives circulating the publication of *Brick Lane*, the choices made in regards to the way the book was introduced to the market played a role in conditioning its interpretation, telling a story not necessarily representative of the text inside. The embossed letters of the title - made of different colours, patterns, textiles and an image of a woman in a sari - stand out from a white background, foregrounding the 'otherness' of the text. The patterns, textures and images featured, set up an 'initial horizon of expectations' for the reader that frames the work through an exoticising lens.

[28] Benwell and Procter, p.137.
[29] Huggan, p.168.

The title of the novel itself, or rather the change in title, added to *Brick Lane*'s contentious reception. Ali has stated that the original title of the book was to be *Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers*, yet this was changed to *Brick Lane* 'at the request of her publishers'.[30] At a Birmingham Literature Festival event in October 2018, authors Diana Evans, Yvvette Edwards and Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi, discussed their journeys into publishing and whether the landscape of British publishing was changing to reflect a more diverse range of authors and stories. Nansubuga Makumbi spoke of her struggle to get her Uganda-based novel *Kintu* published in the UK, despite living and teaching in Britain and the novel's acclaimed reception in Africa. *Kintu* was initially rejected by British publishers on the basis that it could be set in Africa if it also 'had a leg in Europe', that they were 'looking for something like *Brick Lane*'.[31] Nansubuga Makumbi's comments illustrate that the publishing industry is interested in books about different cultures so long as there is a tangible link to the UK. In light of this, Doubleday's insistence that the title of *Brick Lane* be changed from her original title makes sense as it creates a tangible link to the UK, connecting it to a sense of Britishness even as the novel expands beyond the boundaries of the UK. Procter and Benwell refer to texts such as *Brick Lane*, *White Teeth* and *Small Island* as novels with ''crossover' appeal', novels that are about different cultures and races, yet are 'set and produced within London.'[32] It is this tangible link to Britain, and its reassuring familiarity, that ensures the novel's crossover appeal, otherness that is softened by familiarity.

There is a sense that this 'crossover appeal' also extends to the authors of these novels; Ali's profile, whilst exotic, remained familiar yet Nansubuga Makumbi, as a first-generation Ugandan migrant, is less familiar by those same standards. The comments made

[30] Sara Upstone, *British Asian Fiction*, p.184.
[31] Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi, 'Changing the Landscape', *Birmingham Literature Festival*, 6 October 2018.
[32] Benwell and Procter, p.11.

by publishers to Nansubuga Makumbi support Procter and Benwell's claim that 'the international marketplace confers on Ali's metropolitan Bangladeshi-ness a degree of symbolic capital that the 'indigenous' Bangladeshi writer can never hope for because the former occupies […] the supposedly 'nonnational' consecrating centre'.[33] The insistence upon a link to Britain, and the suggestion that novels/novelists require a 'crossover appeal', has racialised undertones that reveal a particularly conservative publishing strategy which imposes national borders on authors and stories and continues to demarcate what constitutes Britishness. Nansubuga Makumbi's comments also highlight the lasting impact of the success of *Brick Lane*, and the stagnation of attitudes within the publishing industry, which continue to privilege a specific type of multicultural tale and author, one that could be presented as other but also familiar. Nansubuga Makumbi's booked was finally published in the UK in 2014, ten years after the publication of *Brick Lane,* yet Ali's text continued to function as a benchmark against which non-white texts and authors were measured.

Whilst the change of the novel's title functioned as an attempt to create this sense of familiar exoticism and explicitly signalled the novel's link to the UK in order to create a broader market appeal, it also encouraged a realist reading of the novel. Suggesting that the novel was a realist account of a community, knowingly or unknowingly, opens the novel up to debates about the authenticity of representation. Outspoken critic of the novel, Germaine Greer, has argued that the title change was calculated to incite controversy, out of fear that the 'novel couldn't go it alone, without exploiting Anglo-Saxon attitudes to a minority community'.[34] The recognisable location, known as the home of a large South Asian migrant population, invites a realist interpretation of the novel, compounded by the decision to host

[33] Benwell and Procter, p.175.
[34] Germaine Greer, 'Reality can bite back', *The Guardian*, 5 August 2006 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/aug/05/bookscomment> [accessed 7 January 2016].

the launch party 'in the commodious rooms of an old brewery in Brick Lane'.[35] Ali's original title might have announced a cultural difference and foregrounded a sense of Ali's racial/ethnic identity, but it would not have suggested the representative reading invited by naming it after a real place with a real community.

Whilst the 2004 paperback edition featured an almost identical cover design - with the exception of the customary addition of the 'shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2003' tagline to 'indicate' and 'confer' prestige – it also included five additional pages of review excerpts as a preface to the novel.[36] The original publication featured only three author endorsements on the back of the jacket cover courtesy of Meera Syal, Hilary Mantel and Margaret Forster. The 2004 edition, however, included five pages of review excerpts, as well as additional endorsements on the front, back and inside back cover. The first quote on the back cover of the novel proclaims the text a 'marriage of a wonderful writer with a fresh, rich and hidden world', stating that 'this is a book written with love and compassion'.[37] This positions Ali as a cultural insider, someone who understands the 'hidden' world she is revealing because she is writing from within it. A second quote praises Ali's 'highly evolved' ability to '[open] up a world whose contours I could recognise, but which I needed Monica Ali to make me understand'.[38] Bedell's comment echoes Peter Ross' earlier presentation of Ali as a natural storyteller, suggesting that her 'highly evolved' ability to reveal a familiar yet exotic world. It is implied that this skill is a direct result of Ali's cultural identity which

[35] Ian Jack, 'It's only a novel…', *The Guardian*, 20 December 2003 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/dec/20/featuresreviews.guardianreview3> [accessed 7 January 2016].
[36] Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.97.
[37] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* (London: Black Swan Books, 2004), back cover.
[38] Ali, *Brick Lane*, inside front cover.

uniquely positions her to reveal the 'hidden world' of a marginalised culture to a majority white British reading public for whom non-white novels satiated a desire for 'infotainment'.[39]

Yet, when these excerpts are put back into the context of the longer reviews to which they belong, they present a much less deterministic and exoticising sense of Ali and the novel. The two sentences featured from the first review occur at separate points within a piece that praises Ali's achievement as a writer who 'has taken it on herself to see the world through the eyes of a woman who, for a large part of the book, hardly leaves her kitchen'.[40] The 'love and compassion' mentioned is in reference to the characters of the novel – 'this is a book written with love and compassion for every struggling character in its pages' – yet taken out of context seems to suggest it is in reference to the real-life community of Brick Lane. Similarly, the second review praises the novel's characterisation of the contradictions that epitomise cultural attitudes to immigration in the UK, describing the novel as 'an exploration of a community that is so quintessentially British that it has given us our national dish, but of which most of us are entirely ignorant'.[41] Put back into this context, the excerpt reads as a comment upon Ali's perceptiveness rather than an essentialisation of her racial identity. One of the questions Bedell poses in her review is 'how much of her [Nazneen's] subtlety will ever be allowed a voice' and whilst the question is posed in relation to Ali's protagonist, it has a wider significance in relation to the subtlety of Ali's own voice, increasingly lost in the manufactured furore surrounding the novel. When re-integrated into the wider context of their reviews, the quotes demonstrate more nuance than the selected excerpts would suggest. The extracts chosen to accompany the text into the marketplace frame the novel in ways that

[39] Fuller, p.48.
[40] Lesley Garner, 'Finding delight in E2', *Evening Standard*, 1 June 2003 <http://www.standard.co.uk/home/finding-delight-in-e2-7432371.html> [accessed 20 January 2016].
[41] Geraldine Bedell, 'Full of East End promise', *The Guardian*, 15 June 2003 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/jun/15/fiction.features1> [accessed 20 January 2016].

capitalise upon the controversy surrounding the novel and appropriate Ali's racial identity into the marketing of the novel.

Another unusual alteration to the paperback edition is the change to the author photograph featured on the inside back cover of the novel. The author photo featured on the hardback edition is a quarter of a page in size and shows Ali, dressed in black, gazing off to the left of the lens, set against a two-toned studio background and accompanied by a brief biography; 'Monica Ali was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and grew up in England. She lives in London with her husband and two small children'.[42] The paperback edition, however, dedicates the inside back cover to a full-page, full-colour image of Ali. Juliet Gardiner has posited that author photographs in paperback editions are usually 'modest', 'passport sized photograph[s]', full sized images typically reserved for hardback formats of the novel.[43] In this respect the decision to change the photo of Ali, in opposition to the norms of publishing culture, is a significant one. In the hardback picture Ali is dressed in black against a generic purple backdrop yet, in the paperback version, she is in casual clothes amongst a noticeably urban background, leaning against a brick wall. Danielle Fuller has posited that

> deliberate slippage between author biography and fictional protagonist […] speaks to the persistent desire within contemporary popular culture to establish a parasocial relationship of intimacy between producer, text, and reader.[44]

The revised image of Ali functions as a deliberate slippage between her and her protagonist. As Nazneen acclimatises to life in the UK and begins to form an identity that accommodates

[42] Ali, *Brick Lane*, inside back cover.
[43] Juliet Gardiner, 'Recuperating the Author: Consuming Fiction of the 1990s', *The Papers of the Bibliographic Society of America*, 94: 2 (June 2000), 255 – 274 (p.260).
[44] Fuller, p.48.

her Bangladeshi roots and contemporary UK reality, clothes and hair play an important role in symbolising her newly hybrid identity. As England starts to feel more real to her then Bangladesh, she begins to experiment with European styles of dress and appearance: shaving her legs whilst everyone is asleep, trying on Chanu's trousers whilst he is out at work. The Nazneen who is ice skating in a sari at the end of the novel, is a hybrid version of the protagonist the reader meets at the beginning and one who is still in flux at the novel's close. Gardiner argues that the 'author photo interpolate[s] the media circuit', where the 'image indicates the epitext the publisher intends for the author'.[45] As the reader finishes the book they are confronted with the image of an early thirties, westernised, identifiably Asian woman, in an urban environment, which functions almost as a projection of Nazneen after the novel's conclusion and, as such, 'equivalence between the signifiers of the fictional text and the real-life referents is presupposed.'[46]

The largeness of the image in the paperback version of the novel confirms Ali's 'star author' status.[47] Joe Moran classifies celebrity authors as ''crossover' successes who emphasize both marketability and traditional cultural hierarchies' and the full-page, full-colour image of Ali in the paperback edition signifies both her celebrity status and the extent to which her image and profile has become integral to the marketability of the novel (p.6). Unlike the image that accompanies the hardback edition, the paperback photo of Ali is not accompanied by an author biography. The omission of this in the paperback edition either speaks to the publishers' confidence that the significant press the novel, and Ali, had received made the need for this redundant, or works to '[conflate] the identity of author and text' by drawing a parallel with the novel's protagonist.[48] Whilst Ali has claimed that the novel's non-

[45] Gardiner, p.260.
[46] Richter, p.61.
[47] Joe Moran, *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p.2.
[48] Gardiner, p.260.

autobiographical status is not something she or '[her] publisher has ever tried to conceal or obscure', this omission suggests the opposite.[49] Without the addition of her biography, which speaks to a mixed heritage even where it may not speak to mixed race, the author photo and excerpts have the potential to elide any sense of mixed-race identity by aligning Ali with a mono-racial identity and community.

SCANDAL ON THE STREETS OF BRICK LANE: FILM ADAPTATION (2006) AND FILM TIE-IN PAPERBACK (2007)

The paratexts of the paperback edition of the novel work towards presenting Ali as a cultural insider and her novel as an authentic insight into the South Asian Brick Lane community. In her article 'Why do Asian writers have to be 'authentic' to succeed', Sarfraz Manzoor argues that the publishing industry wants authors that it can promote as authentic, those that are 'sufficiently of the culture to be able to exploit and extract from their heritage, and for their publishers to claim they are authentic, but also in a strictly literal sense, exceptional'.[50] Manzoor echoes the observations of this thesis by highlighting that many of the prominent British Asian authors are either mixed race themselves or in interracial relationships with white British partners – authors like Monica Ali, Hari Kunzru and Gautam Malkani. Manzoor's argument speaks to the sentiments of publishers using *Brick Lane* as a model for its successors in its suggestion that publishers require non-white authors to straddle a fine line between other and familiar. Her article reiterates the argument of this thesis in identifying mixed race as integral to the success of non-white authors and the way mixedness is

[49] Monica Ali, 'The outrage economy', *The Guardian*, 13 October 2007 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/oct/13/fiction.film> [accessed 7 January 2016].
[50] Sarfraz Manzoor, 'Why do Asian writers have to be 'authentic' to succeed?', *The Guardian*, 30 April 2006 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/apr/30/1> [accessed 13 March 2019].

mobilised to construct an authorial persona that can be marketed as a mediated cultural insider.

As Manzoor points out, this purposely negates that these authors are speaking from very specific, and privileged, subject positions, but I would argue further that Ali's mixed-race identity specifically constructs a fragile sense of authenticity. In a literary economy where authenticity has become a contested, but marketable space, the controversies surrounding claims of authorial authenticity 'tend to aid in their literature's further circulation'.[51] In so far as publishers seem to be attracted to authors that they can promote as authentic, it is equally profitable to be embroiled in debates about inauthenticity;

> The media demands diversity and authenticity but writers are rarely capable of fulfilling this expectation. When a writer emerges who appears to be giving us the real deal they are immediately lionised, and when it is revealed they are not they are criticised.[52]

Ali's mixed-race identity provides both of these options at the same time; legitimate claims towards cultural authenticity and connection to the community of Brick Lane, as well as the suggestion that, because she is mixed race, she is an outsider; either option provides a viable marketing strategy.

It was Ali's mixed-race identity that became embroiled in the controversy surrounding the film adaptation of *Brick Lane* in 2006 when protestors objected to the filming of the adaptation on the streets of Brick Lane. The vexed issue of Ali's identity was at the heart of the controversy surrounding the novel's release and was re-invigorated by the

[51] Sarah Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), p.10.
[52] Manzoor, 'Why do Asian writers have to be 'authentic' to succeed?'.

initial attempts of the film's production company to film on the streets of Brick Lane. During the filming of the movie, rumours abounded about Ali's degradation of the Sylheti population, a particularly persistent tale circulating about a scene 'where lice fall from a character's hair into food'.[53] Reports in the aftermath of the controversy stated that rumours about the protests were overblown by journalists hungry for the next Rushdie-esque fatwa and prominent, if 'self-appointed "community leaders"',[54] who protested that Ali had 'targeted [their] community to get rich'.[55] Their ire was supposedly about the misrepresentation of the Sylheti community as 'dirty little monkeys',[56] yet in actuality seemed to stem from a condemnation of Ali's unrepresentative background and her status as a mixed race, privileged woman: 'she is not one of us. She left Bangladesh at the age of 3. She does not speak any Bengali, not to mention the Sylheti dialect, and is married to a white Englishman.'[57] Benwell, Procter and Robinson have posited that debates about the burden of representation are a reflection of the 'tension between representation as artistic *depiction* and representation as political *delegation*'.[58] Whilst the protests might have had the veneer of being about the ways in which the Sylheti community was presented within the novel, at its core the debate was a political one about Ali's right to depict a community that various other interested parties had decided she was unqualified to comment upon because she does not

[53] Johann Hari, 'What's at stake in the Battle of Brick Lane', *The Independent*, 31 July 2006 <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/johann-hari/johann-hari-whats-at-stake-in-the-battle-of-brick-lane-409992.html> [accessed 13 March 2019].
[54] Nick Cohen, 'Let's not bow to the book burners of Brick Lane', *Evening Standard*, 26 September 2007 <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/lets-not-bow-to-the-book-burners-of-brick-lane-6691681.html> [accessed 13 March 2019].
[55] Hari, 'What's at stake in the Battle of Brick Lane'.
[56] Jonathan Heawood, 'The battle for Brick Lane', *The Guardian*, 27 July 2006 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/jul/27/noskatinginsaris> [accessed 13 March 2019].
[57] Hasan Suroor, 'Battle of Brick Lane', *The Hindu*, 2 August 2006 <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/quotbattle-of-brick-lanequot-fizzles-out/article3084076.ece> [accessed 13 March 2019].
[58] Benwell, Procter and Robinson, p.96.

speak Bengali and married a white British man. In the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy – where 'us' represents the Bangladeshi community and 'them' the white British majority – Ali's mixed race, British upbringing, combined with her white husband, function as the equivalent of white Britishness in this context.

This disqualification of Ali's claim to a Bengali identity because of her proximity to whiteness is echoed in Germaine Greer's public indictment of the novel. In her criticism of the novel, and the author herself, Greer highlights Ali's mixed heritage as damning evidence of her 'treacherous […] invasion and betrayal':

> Ali is on the near side of British culture, not far from the middle. She writes in English and her point of view is, whether she allows herself to impersonate a village Bangladeshi woman or not, British. She has forgotten her Bengali, which she would not have done if she had wanted to remember it. [59]

Greer's comments reproach Ali for cultural appropriation and her mixed-race identity is seized upon as proof of her 'inauthenticity'. Greer's statements neglect the contradictions present in her indictment; surely, in order for a 'betrayal' to have taken place, Ali would have to identify as part of the community she is portraying, yet she repeatedly disavowed any identification or connection with the Sylheti community depicted in the novel, detailing in her acknowledgements the novel's reliance upon research and existing scholarship. In a reflection of the Greater Sylhet Welfare and Development Council's critiques, Greer locates Ali's inauthenticity within her mixed-race identity – the 'near side of British culture' an oblique reference to Ali's white British heritage. Ali's monolingualism is presented as a lack of respect and cultural connection, a deliberate act of forgetting. Greer's indictment

[59] Germaine Greer, 'Reality Bites'.

demonstrates a damaging ignorance of the complexity of race and ethnicity, hostility towards Ali and a lack of awareness of the privileged subject position from which she is speaking as an established, wealthy white public figure.

These claims are reductive and essentialist in regard to Ali's mixed-race identity, and, as Salman Rushdie pointed out in his rebuke of Greer, to the British-Bangladeshi community to whom she has 'denied that same Britishness';

> The British-Bangladeshi Ali is denied her heritage and belittled for her Britishness, while her British-Bangladeshi critics are denied that same Britishness, which most of them would certainly insist was theirs by right.[60]

Rushdie highlights the 'problems of ethnically marked literature' in which the 'commodification of the exotic and the authentic […] is based on the simultaneous exclusion of the represented objects'.[61] These discourses of representation and authenticity continue to proliferate in relation to non-white authors in Britain, insisting upon a notion of authenticity that exists 'for as long as it perform[s] the task it is supposed to'.[62] Upstone argues that criticism of the novel is not only about Ali's representation of community, 'but her own 'non-representative' status' which 'reflects a dangerous homogenising of what it means to be British-Asian'.[63] It is clear that not only does the commentary surrounding Ali homogenise and demarcate what it means to be both Asian and British, but also what it means to be mixed race and where it positions individuals like Ali in relation to these over-arching cultural and

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[60] Salman Rushdie, 'Brickbats fly over Brick Lane', *The Guardian*, 29 July 2006 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/jul/29/comment.letters> [accessed 20 January 2016].
[61] Richter, p.71.
[62] Claire Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary Writers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.12.
[63] Upstone, *British Asian Fiction*, p.184.

racial divides. Sunny Hundal has termed this stalemate a 'trap that Germaine Greer is leading Asian writers into' where 'they are lauded by the chattering classes as being "an authentic new voice of multicultural Britain" before being gently pushed off the cliff when there is a protest', a paradox that has increased resonance for authors of mixed race.[64]

This intellectual skirmish between Greer and Rushdie raised important issues surrounding the expectations placed on non-white British authors and provided Ali with a space to respond and 'engage in acts of self-construction and critique'.[65] In her article, 'The Outrage Economy', Ali addressed the 'media distortion' of the protests, the last minute 'diary clash' that resulted in the planned royal film screening of *Brick Lane* being cancelled, and the charge of inauthenticity that had been levied against her.[66] Her response highlights the variety of issues intrinsic to the 'authenticity craze'.

> The second bit of baggage to unpack comes with the label "authenticity" attached. Who is allowed to write about what? What right does a novelist have to explore any particular subject matter? Who hands out the licences? (ibid).

Ali's article is a strident dismissal of the 'authenticity test' she, and other authors such as Gautam Malkani, have been 'accused of failing' and a criticism of societal attitudes that demand authenticity as a requirement from non-white authors in a way it would never expect from their white British counterparts. Just as Zadie Smith, Hanif Kureishi and Hari Kunzru before her, Ali participated in the customary denial of representativeness that appeared to be

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[64] Sunny Hundal, 'End the Brick Lane Brouhaha', *The Guardian*, 31 July 2006 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/jul/31/whybricklanemustgoahead> [accessed 13 March 2019].
[65] Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.2.
[66] Monica Ali, 'The outrage economy'.

a mandatory rite of passage marking a non-white author's arrival into the literary sphere. 'The outrage economy' was Ali's first, extensive comment on the controversy that had followed her from the page to the screen. The article was included as an afterword to the 2007 re-issue of the novel with a film tie in jacket cover and in one sense it acts as a final word on the subject. If readers were aware of the controversy surrounding the film or had indeed brought the book as an act of participation in the debates, then Ali's afterword functions as a refutation of the ways in which her words and narrative had been co-opted.

In this sense, including it as an almost compulsory aspect of the book, rather than the optional act of reading the article online, functions as an 'act of political refusal [that] becomes a gateway to authorial self-definition'.[67] In another sense, however, it exemplifies what Sarah Brouillette has termed the postcolonial 'marketability of self-consciousness', where an author's own 'awareness of this complicity' becomes a marketable selling point (p.7). In a similar vein, Huggan has suggested that there is a cachet attached to marginality that suggests 'that 'resistance' itself has become a valuable intellectual commodity' and in this sense, the addition of Ali's essay to the 2007 edition of the text works as a way of capitalising upon the cachet of her marginality.[68] Either way, it is incorporated into a cycle of denial in which the 'protest *must* be made public to function as protest', but is then contained and defused by incorporation into mainstream discourse and utilised as a marketable asset.[69]

The protests and ensuing debates surrounding the novel suggest numerous, often contradictory, discourses and agendas, but what they do highlight clearly is 'public hunger for some insights into British-Bangladeshi life', for greater and more varied cultural

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[67] Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*, p.72.
[68] Huggan, p.83.
[69] Jens-Martin Gurr, 'Bourdieu, Capital, and the Postcolonial Marketplace' in *Commodifying (Post)Colonialism: Othering, Reification, Commodification and the New Literatures and Cultures in English* ed.by Rainer Emig and Oliver Lindner (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 3 – 23 (p.5).

representation in general.[70] The 'burden of representation' would not be so heavy, perhaps, if there were more stories available depicting the lives of the non-white population of the UK. When members of the Pakistani Action Committee protested the film premiere of *My Beautiful Laundrette* in 1985, Hanif Kureishi expressed sympathy for members of the Pakistani community excited by the idea of seeing a British-Pakistani story on screen and dismayed by the film's presentation of an interracial, homosexual relationship.

> They just wanted to shout, and I was rather sympathetic. If there aren't any films about Pakistanis, and then a film comes out at the centre of which is a gay Pakistani, I can see how they'd think 'Fuck! This was my chance to be shown as a nice fellow'.[71]

Danuta Kean argues that in the current publishing climate the 'best chance of publication for a BAME novelist is to write literary fiction that conforms to a stereotypical view of Black or Asian communities'.[72] In this context the pressure and expectation placed upon BME authors who break through the white 'gatekeepers' can be understood, to a certain extent, regardless as to whether that is a realistic or fair expectation (p.17). Monica Ali's success, the hype around Hari Kunzru's 2002 debut and Zadie Smith's domination of the bestseller lists, appeared to advent a new era, yet upon reflection more closely resembled 'a false dawn', a trend rather than an institutional or cultural change (p.13).

Furthermore, if we examine the authors that have broken through, it is questionable as to whether the publication of Ali, Smith and Kunzru suggests much more than a moderate, temporal change in publishing output. Manzoor argues that it is authors such as Ali, Kunzru

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[70] 'The trouble with Brick Lane', *The Guardian*, 27 October 2007 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/oct/27/books.immigration> [accessed 14 March 2019].
[71] Chambers, p.242.
[72] Kean, p.8.

and Kureishi that have risen to the top of the market, against the odds, precisely because of their mixed race 'inauthenticity'.

> It is astonishing how many of the writers credited with telling typically Asian stories are in fact atypical - either Oxbridge-educated, mixed race, in mixed-race relationships or all of the above.[73]

Manzoor's statement is problematic in its suggestion that these authors are chosen because they are ethnic enough to appeal to a middle class, liberal audience and offer a strong marketing hook to publishers yet are incapable of offering a BME readership any authentic sense of their own lived experience of being British Asian/black.

Whilst Manzoor's argument is flawed, it does make an important connection between the writers referenced that is pertinent to a discussion of the debate surrounding Ali's position. It would be reductive to suggest that *Brick Lane*, or the novels of Smith and Kunzru, were written with a white audience in mind or to suggest that the novels are successful because they trade in stereotypes. It is apparent, however, that a large part of the attention garnered by the novels is due to the profiles of their mixed-race authors; one only has to view the eagerness with which Doubleday acquired Ali's manuscript to see this in evidence. Although Ali's mixed race is non-traditional in the predominantly white publishing industry, like Kunzru and Smith, very little else about her profile is non-traditional: she attended a fee-paying school, followed by Oxford University and then moved to London, the publishing centre of the UK. Whilst Ali's racial identity marks her as different, the other aspects of her identity – socio-economic status, education, location – align with the traditionally elite publishing industry.

[73] Manzoor, 'Why do Asian writers have to be 'authentic' to succeed?'.

Doubleday's discovery of Ali in 2002 was in the midst of multiculturalism's moment. In the midst of the New Labour government's celebration of diversity, it followed on the heels of the success of *White Teeth* and the introduction of mixed race as an identification option on the census. As discussed in the first chapter, during this period the idea of mixed race and the figure of the mixed-race British author functioned in specific ways within the national narrative, utilised to uphold political discourses and in the project of marketing multiculturalism. At this particular moment in time there was additional cultural capital to be gained from being mixed race, evidenced by Doubleday's eagerness to capitalise on 'a hipper, sophisticated readership' through the author and her work.[74] Ali's appeal encompasses the promise of a tale of 'racial conflict, Jihad, BNP', mediated in a post 9/11 landscape by her middle class, Oxbridge profile.[75] She is attractive and interracial enough to appeal to a wide demographic, particularly the wealthier, white ABC1 market – consumers from the highest socio-economic groups - most likely to purchase literary fiction, but not so 'other' that it alienates her target market.

Whilst Ali's racial background made her more desirable to 'cool hunters' in the publishing industry and to readers searching for more subversive literary fiction, it is apparent that it was an arrival fraught with terms and conditions.[76]

> It is undeniable that the rise of the so-called meritocratic elite has cleared the way for certain exceptional members of recently oppressed minorities to operate and

[74] Budhos, 'An ethnic tale of girl power'.
[75] Archive document from Penguin Random House archives (Rushden, Northamptonshire) [accessed 4 September 2017].
[76] Daragh O'Reilly, 'Martin Amis on Marketing' in *Consuming Books: The marketing and consumption of literature*, ed.by Stephen Brown (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 73 – 83 (p.74).

> sometimes even succeed at the highest levels – what it has so far failed to deliver, and perhaps was never engineered to ensure, is a full sense of arrival, of belonging.[77]

Ali's status as a celebrity author and an important cultural figure was established before the novel was published and the novel itself functioned as a 'cultural object being reproduced within an extensive social framework of cultural exchange'.[78] The attention garnered by the novel came to epitomise the ways in which ideas about mixed-race identity and authenticity were interconnected. The controversy surrounding the novel revealed the endurance of outdated ideas about race and cultural identity, reiterated through claims of cultural appropriation and inauthenticity.

Brouillette argues that 'each moment in an author's marketing […] becomes a part of the paratext for his subsequent works reception', suggesting that the *Brick Lane* affair would be invoked with every new work Ali published.[79] Keen to remove herself from these debates and narratives, Ali's work in the aftermath of *Brick Lane* revealed an aversion to discussing matters of race or ethnicity. Hari Kunzru's comments, in an interview following the publication of *The Impressionist*, highlights the effects of this persistent racialisation on his own state of mind and approach to his follow-up novel, as well as its effect on Smith and Ali.

> It would be interesting to see what Monica Ali does next. I have no idea what she's writing about, but I wonder what would happen if she wrote a novel with no Bengali

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[77] Vinson Cunningham, 'How Chris Jackson Is Building a Black Literary Movement', *The New York Times Magazine*, 2 February 2016 <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/07/magazine/how-chris-jackson-is-building-a-black-literary-movement.html> [accessed 15 March 2019].
[78] Benwell, Procter and Robinson, p.72.
[79] Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*, p.2.

> characters in it. Will readers accept that from her? I'm certainly looking at a project that has nothing to do with race at all. This will be the acid test.[80]

His statements reflect the fatigue experienced by himself, and his peers, in the aftermath of the publication of their debut novels which had been defined by a persistent focus upon race and their racial identities. Kunzru suggests that Ali's second novel would focus on white characters, to 'test' how far her success is predicated on taking race as a subject; a strategy that Ali's successive work followed, each book moving her further away from the hyper racialised world of *Brick Lane* and her own racial identity. Her second novel *Alentejo Blue* (2006) was a multiple perspective narrative about a small community in Portugal, the protagonist in her third novel *In The Kitchen* (2009) an older Northern white British man managing a kitchen of immigrant cooks and her latest novel *Untold Story* (2011) reimagined Princess Diana's death as a cover up. With each novel Ali has moved further away from the overtly racialised protagonists of *Brick Lane*, both real and fictional, until she eventually took Princess Diana – a bastion of British identity – as her subject, as far removed from the subject matter and racialisation of her debut as possible. Upstone argues that Ali's follow-up novels represent 'a strategic refusal to accept such definition in 'representative' terms, and attempt to make the claim for a more definitively 'literary' reading of British Asian texts'.[81]

Whilst Ali's drastic change in subject and location reflects a refusal of the expectations placed upon her and the framing of *Brick Lane*, the response to her follow-up novels illustrates the centrality of those debates to her consumer appeal and the saleability of race – as both object (author) and subject (text) – within the literary marketplace. Unlike Smith or Kunzru, whose work and profile have found a continuous resonance within the

[80] Fredrick Luis Aldama, 'Hari Kunzru in Conversation', *Wasafiri*, 45:20 (2005), 11-14 (p.14).
[81] Upstone, *British Asian Fiction*, p.185.

literary market, Ali's commercial success and profile have declined in the aftermath of *Brick Lane* in a trajectory that is synonymous with her move away from race as a subject matter. The less her novels centralise the issue of race, and the less synonymous they are with her own persona and racial identity, the less tangible her appeal. Claire Chambers argues that Ali's second novel was received badly in 'partly because of the uneven quality of the writing, but also because it did not operate 'in an expected way', in its refusal to talk about race in Britain.[82] This connection between race and commercial appeal was also recognised in Procter and Benwell's study, *Reading Across Worlds: Transnational Book Groups and the Reception of Difference*, where readers identified Ali's move away from race as a subject matter as an explanation for the significantly more muted success of her second novel.[83] Although *Brick Lane* catalysed debates over the vexed issues of racial and cultural identity that divided opinion and implicated Ali's own mixed-race identity, the relatively lacklustre response to Ali's follow up work reveals the reliance upon, and success of, using race as a marketing tool in selling a novel and creating a star author.

Throughout the duration of *Brick Lane*'s lifespan, and afterwards with her pointed move away from race as a topic, Ali attempted to speak against the discourses constructed around her and articulate a sense of mixed-race identity authentic to her. Interviews and profiles of authors are ostensibly spaces in which they can 'claim a self, to speak to [their] oppression to name oppressors'[84] and Ali's own words during interviews work to disrupt the discourse created by the marketing of exoticism. In an interview with David Cohen for the *London Evening Standard*, Ali talks about the 'inter-generational' and inter-cultural conflict that defined her earlier years; her refusal to speak Bengali as a rebellion against her father's culture and the 'time and maturity' it took for her to be able 'to appreciate the richness of my

[82] Chambers, p.12.
[83] Procter and Benwell, p.143.
[84] Chambers, p.16.

heritage'.[85] In addressing the question that 'people keep asking' about 'what [her] allegiances are' she responded, 'I don't feel the need for allegiances. To me, home is nowhere in particular. I am a storyteller. I am an observer' (ibid).

Ali's response to this question highlights flexibility, openness and complexity in relation to her racial and ethnic identity; her approach to identity is not about allegiances or singular notions of home, yet there is a persistent desire in the discourses surrounding Ali to locate her somewhere, to 'know' her origins and identify where she belongs. The tension between Ali's refusal to define her position and society's insistence upon fixed definitions is evident within the very article in which this statement features. Cohen reports Ali's words amidst statements of his surprise that, 'given her half-Asian background', she didn't turn up to the interview 'decked out in a modest, knee-length skirt or even a silk sari' (ibid). He states that

> she writes with such masterful intimate detail about the concealed world of the Bengali community in Tower Hamlets, east London, that part of you expects her to be wearing a burka herself. (ibid)

Claire Squires has argued that 'locking authors and their work into stereotypes […] is at best reductive and at worst ethnocentric' and once again Cohen's description of Ali actively positions her through racial stereotypes.[86] Cohen acknowledges her mixed race yet reduces it to a mono-racial stereotype in his expectation that she will arrive dressed in a 'burka', a statement loaded with racialised, often negative, connotations. The nuance of Ali's statement

[85] David Cohen, 'Lunch with Monica Ali', *Evening Standard*, 13 October 2003 <https://www.standard.co.uk/showbiz/lunch-with-monica-ali-6986026.html> [accessed 18 March 2019].
[86] Squires, p.122.

is lost and undermined within a narrative trading in racialised stereotypes. Ali's individual voice battled against an environment in which these discourses proliferate, her continued attempts to regain control of her narrative – both in media articles and through her later fiction - illuminate the struggle to articulate complex notions of race in a cultural climate where racial stereotypes are continually re-entrenched and traded upon.

In response to the repeated speculation and commentary upon her racial identity, and her inability to find traction within profile pieces, Ali contributed an article to *The Guardian* entitled 'Where I'm coming from...', a complex and nuanced exploration of her own identity. The article presents a sense that Ali is romanticising her own history, strategically utilising her marginality, even as it demonstrates the ignorance of interpreting her, or the novel, in that manner. The piece begins:

> If, on one of those murderous nights, the knock came at our door, we knew what to do. I was three years old. My brother was five. Next door to our apartment building in Tejgoan was an orphanage, and in the grounds was an orchard. It was the big mango tree that would save us.[87]

The opening of her article has all the hallmarks of a postcolonial tale of escape from a landscape defined by exotic fruits and tyrannical regimes, where she is saved by taking refuge in her mother's benevolent 'home' country. Her response to the question of whether *Brick Lane* is autobiographical is not the vehement denial that defines some of her later interviews and profiles, but a more complicated mediation that has the potential to reinforce the discourses she refutes;

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[87] Monica Ali, 'Where I'm coming from…', *The Guardian*, 17 June 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/jun/17/artsfeatures.fiction> [accessed 20 January 2016].

> My book does not trace my family history. It is not concerned with all that. And yet there is something there: difficult to define, but demanding - in my eyes, at least – recognition (ibid).

In a cultural climate in which there is no framework or vocabulary to articulate what a mixed-race identity may mean, it is easy to see how statements like Ali's above might validate the legitimacy of reading *Brick Lane* through an autobiographical, ethnocentric lens. It is much easier to reconcile, and promote, the author and the novel in terms and frameworks that are already established, through 'the construction of biographical fictions that audiences […] understand and respond to', than to envisage new ones that are 'difficult to define'.[88] Ali states that her own tendency 'when […] asked "what inspired you to write this?"' is to give a 'response that deals in black and white, not the half-tones which shade any passable writing', comparing the question to

> something of a greeting. And I respond in that semi-automatic way that we all tend to adopt with greetings. Very well, thanks. Not so bad. How are you? I tell the truth, but a truth so attenuated by the circumstances of the exchange that it casts as much light as a candle in a gale.[89]

Whilst she might attempt to articulate her own identity in the 'half-tones' that define her mixed-race experience, attenuated to her 'inherited memory' of her family's migrant experience, as well her experience of growing up in the UK, there is no space for the

[88] Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*, p.12.
[89] Ali, 'Where I'm coming from…'

'candlelight' nuance and complexity of that discussion in the 'gale' of attitudes to race displayed in some of the materials considered. Ali's comments are complicated and encompass the ways in which personal histories, particularly those of diasporic populations, become romanticised and the ways in which those diasporic histories at once belong, and yet do not belong, to the second generations born or brought up in the UK. In contrast to interpretations eager to read Ali's words as confirmation of the similarities between her life and the world of the text, Ali does not suggest that *Brick Lane* is a true story, or even her story, but what the text and author do share is a sense of recognition, an echo of the experience of being British Asian in the UK or part of the Bangladeshi diaspora. In the debates about representation surrounding the novel, authenticity is presented as a totality, something definitive and quantifiable, yet identity and experience are always subjective and, as such, racial and cultural connections are acts of recognition rather than confirmation. Novels such as *Brick Lane* have the potential to '*move* and connect different reading constituencies' as well as 'conjure the prospect of cannibalistic consumption or 'colonizing appropriation'', which consumes difference rather than seeking to understand or relate to it.[90] The ways in which Ali's authorial persona was used 'in the service of […] her book', encouraged a cannibalistic reading of the text that does not allow space for all the possibilities and connections the text, and Ali, make available.[91]

[90] Benwell and Procter, p.14.
[91] Gardiner, p.260.

4. MIXED RACE AS ORDINARY: DIANA EVANS

> It was always inevitable that Diana Evans would, at some point, be described as the "new Zadie Smith". Smith, of course, won several first novel awards for White Teeth, and now Diana Evans has been shortlisted for the Orange Award for New Writers for her debut novel, 26a.[1]
>
> Book marketers crave bestseller comparisons and Chatto & Windus must have rubbed their hands in glee when handed the file on Diana Evans. She is mixed race and the characters in her book are mixed race – Zadie Smith and Monica Ali references duly branded.[2]

Published in 2005, Diana Evans was the latest in a sequence of mixed-race British novelists for whom Zadie Smith was the 'yardstick for assessing new talent'.[3] Following in the footsteps of Hari Kunzru in 2002 and Monica Ali in 2003, Evans was quickly branded as Smith's successor, and, comparisons between the two seemed inevitable. Both authors are mixed race, of a similar age and grew up in the same area in north west London where their debut novels were set. Whilst, as I will argue later on, their first novels *26a* and *White Teeth* are significantly different in tone and in scope, both novels follow the lives of an interracial family in London as mixed-race children grow up in the 1980s. Both novels received critical acclaim and were nominated for/won literary prizes, including the Orange Prize for fiction,

[1] Emine Saner, 'Don't call me the new Zadie', *Evening Standard*, 26 April 2005 <https://www.standard.co.uk/showbiz/dont-call-me-the-new-zadie-7274402.html> [accessed 18 March 2019].
[2] 'Double Trouble and Twin Peaks', *Scotland on Sunday*, 27 March 2005.
[3] Stein, p.175.

which *White Teeth* was nominated for and *26a* won. Whilst Evans' publishers and the media were keen to conflate her work and her profile with that Smith, Evans' success has never approached anything near to the popularity and wide reach of Smith's immediate celebrity, or the hype surrounding Hari Kunzru and Monica Ali.

Unlike Smith and Kunzru, who quickly developed a transnational appeal and profile, Evans, whilst initially incorporated into the emerging oeuvre of multicultural mixed-race fiction that defined the early noughties, has since become increasingly ensconced within the canon of black British literature. Although her debut novel received critical acclaim and attention, the public reception of the novel was underwhelming in comparison to the huge success of *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* published a few years before. Following on from the publication of *26a* in 2005, Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani* (2006) suffered a similar fate. Similarly hyped as the new Zadie Smith and receiving large amounts of pre-release publicity about a novel set in London amongst British-Asian street gangs, Malkani achieved a lot of press and critical attention, yet an underwhelming response from the British reading public. This chapter is interested in exploring what it means to be labelled the 'new Zadie Smith' post-*Brick Lane* and why the interest in so-called 'multicultural' fiction, arguably the most influential literary trend in the UK at the start of the twenty-first century, was waning with Evans' and Malkani's texts 'swept under' the tide. [4]

This chapter is particularly interested in the ways in which Diana Evans was positioned within the literary field primarily as a black British writer in contrast to Smith, whose more 'multicultural' designation has functioned to free her from some of the limitations imposed on authors by the black British label. Whereas Smith's mixed-race identity seems to contribute to the sense of an internationalised black British identity as referred to in John McLeod's work, Evans' mixed-race identity has been more clearly

[4] Fuller, p.40.

demarcated as black.[5] This chapter is also interested in exploring the ways in which academic responses to texts contribute to the positioning of authors within the market and the literary canon. By examining media and academic responses to *26a*, this chapter will examine the ways in which the novel was positioned as a black text and examine whether Evans' location within a black British canon affected her reception and mediated her success. Following on from this, I will explore the ways in which race and mixed-race identity are presented in Diana Evans' debut *26a* and her latest novel *Ordinary People*, published in 2018, to identify whether Evans' positioning, or the ways in which she is read, has shifted since 2005 and what that might suggest.

In the article 'A Tale of Two Novels: Developing a Devolved Approach to Black British Writing', Corinne Fowler undertakes a similar experiment. Fowler examines the success of *White Teeth* against the underwhelming reception of Joe Pemberton's novel *Forever and Ever Amen* which was released a month after Smith's debut. Although Pemberton's novel explored similar themes of black British life and multiculturalism and achieved critical acclaim, neither the novel nor the author achieved the same heights of popular success as Zadie Smith. Whilst this can be attributed in part to Smith's obvious appeal as an attractive young Londoner and Cambridge graduate – Pemberton, an older black man from Manchester, is the less obviously marketable author – Fowler argues that the ways in which Pemberton's novel was positioned and marketed also contributed to the novel's limited public success. Fowler argues that one of the reasons for Pemberton's mediocre reception is the novel's setting in the north of England:

[5] John McLeod, 'Some problems with "British"; In a "Black British canon", *Wasafiri*, 17:36 (2002), 56-59.
John McLeod, 'Extra Dimensions, New Routines', *Wasafiri*, 25:4 (2010), 45-52.

> northern "accented" literature is not "sexy" in the world of publishing. In fact, the "provincial" label lurks perilously near in marketing publishers' judgements about potential international markets.[6]

Whilst the location of his novel outside of the metropolitan centre may have contributed to Pemberton's middling success, it makes Evans' more muted popular reception more difficult to comprehend as her novel was set in the exact same London borough as that of *White Teeth*, Smith and Evans having grown up in close proximity to each other. All of Evans' novels are set in London and feature characters from a variety of racial backgrounds. The disjuncture between their levels of success, despite the similarities in their authorial personas, offers an interesting lens through which to consider the prerequisites for success in the cultural climate of the early noughties and the ways in which discourses of race continue to condition conceptualisations of racial identity.

Fowler argues that the marketing decision to feature a young black boy on the front cover of Pemberton's book detrimentally affected its reception, positioning the novel as a specifically 'black' story, rather than a 'sexy' multicultural tale (p.81).

> Harrington attributes the novel's failure to "the naivety of the jacket", which depicts a young black boy dressed in dungarees set against a lilac background. Moreover, the novel's narrative voice remains that of a nine-year-old throughout, leaving no "mature" or authoritative omniscient narrator to guide the reader through some weighty themes and complex plotting (p.77).

[6] Corinne Fowler, p.81.

The front cover of *26a* works in a similar way towards positioning the novel as a 'black' text, potentially alienating an early noughties audience that had shown a proclivity for multicultural fiction, but less inclination to gravitate towards stereotypically 'black' texts. The first paperback edition of *26a* features a young, mixed-race girl with a noticeable afro sitting outside of the door of a loft, presumably the door to 26a. In contrast, the front cover design of *White Teeth* is a mismatch of vibrant colours and patterns that suggest different cultural references, without overtly associating the novel with a particular race or culture. If, as Fowler argues, the front cover design of *Forever and Ever Amen* acted as a deterrent to a wider audience, then *26a*'s cover works in a similar way by coding it as a book about 'blackness'.

Furthermore, I argue that Evans herself was presented in a similar way. The pictures of Smith that circulated around the publication of *White Teeth*, including the author photograph featured on early editions of the novel, showed Smith with straightened hair which, combined with Smith's light skin tone and European features, did not immediately cohere with perceived ideas about physical markers of blackness. In contrast, however, the photographs that accompanied the promotional material for the novel, and the author photograph featured in *26a*, whilst highlighting Evans' appeal as a young, attractive author, more overtly suggest her black heritage. Her skin is darker in colour and she wears her hair in a loose, yet noticeable, afro with cornrow plaits at the front. It is difficult to ascertain how much agency the author has within this process and, without suggesting that her physicality is something that could or should be obscured, it is plausible that this affected the ways in which she was positioned as a 'part of the revival of black British women writers', a designation that potentially marginalised her audience.[7] Although Smith asserts a black British identity now, wearing a head wrap or her hair curly in all publicity photos from the

[7] 'Double Take', *The Pulse*, 28 February 2005.

past few years, it is significant that Smith was initially introduced to the marketplace without any physically overt markers of raciality, yet Evans was not. Graham Huggan argues in *The Postcolonial Exotic* that 'the paratextual apparatuses surrounding narratives' work as 'signifying […] processes by which the book's multiple readerships are constructed'.[8] The paratextual elements surrounding the publication of *26a* contribute to the sense of the novel as a specifically 'black' text, appealing to a specifically black audience.

If these more overt associations with blackness potentially marginalised the audiences for Evans' texts - even though she arguably still benefitted from this sense of mixed race cultural cachet and privilege that was evident in the early years of the millennium – the fixation upon mixedness as a marketing USP perpetuates problematic hierarchies of race that remain predicated on colourism and proximity to whiteness. The consequence of this, for Evans, as the result of her more overt racialisation, was the marginalisation of her potential audience, though the effects of this were mediated by her mixedness and the obvious comparison to Smith. This hierarchy of mixedness, however, is not only problematic for other mixed-race authors, who are allocated market share in reference to their proximity to Smith on the 'multicultural' mixed race scale, but has ramifications for black British authors such as Courttia Newland, Patrice Lawrence and Alex Wheatle, who are further shifted down the racial hierarchy without the intangible sense of the multicultural that works to diversify these mixed-race authors' audience base. Without this, the audience for black-British authors is further marginalised through the reification of the assumption that their texts deal explicitly with niche, specifically black – which in turn is implicitly *not* multicultural - issues as Fowler demonstrates through her analysis of Joe Pemberton's work and positioning.

[8] Huggan, p.166.

Sara Wajid comments on the problematic nature of measuring all non-white novelists against Smith's success and the vogue in the early noughties for publishing novels with similarly 'multicultural' themes to that of *White Teeth*.

> The novel *26a* is painfully sexy in publishing terms. It is the first work of fiction by Diana Evans, a beautiful black West London writer - a description that immediately conjures up urban coolness, particularly in the notoriously fuddy-duddy literary world.[9]

Wajid suggests that publishing companies were utilising young, non-white authors in this period to reinvent their images and present themselves as relevant within the era of celebratory multiculturalism that defined the early years of the millennium. This echoes Fowler's argument that novels - and I argue that authors should also be considered within this project – 'can be marketed as a brand, a purveyor of taste and a means of constructing identity'.[10] Wajid refers to Evans as a 'black' writer and comments upon the ways in which blackness is often conflated with this sense of 'urban coolness':

> The knee-jerk habit of casting young black literary talent as cool, regardless of subject matter or literary style, is wearing very thin. But the irony is that Evans is actually very cool, and has been as long as I've known her, since we were undergraduates together at Sussex University in 1991. Not cool "for a writer", not cool in a "geek-chic" way, just plain old intrinsically cool, by universally recognised criteria - cool

[9] Sara Wajid, 'Muse attacks? Retreat for a while to a more lackadaisical environment', *Times Higher Education*, 25 March 2005 <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/cn/features/muse-attacks-retreat-for-a-while-to-a-more-lackadaisical-environment/194975.article> [accessed 18 March 2019].
[10] Fowler, p.80.

> dresser, cool dancer, cool music collection, cool London DJ mates - proper effortless cool.[11]

Although ostensibly calling attention to the ways in which black authors are marketed in repetitive and stereotypical ways that negate their individuality and potentially ghettoise their work, Wajid's description of Evans' coolness functions in a similar way. Attributing Evans' 'coolness' to her clothes, music and her status as a Londoner reifies Evans in the same terms through which blackness, or 'urban-ness', is most often communicated. Similarly, reviews of the novel call attention to the tokenistic likening of the novel and the author to that of Smith – 'publishers hailed her the 'new voice of multicultural Britain' and compared the novel to *White Teeth* though they have nothing in common'[12] – yet very few reviews of the novel resist the urge to refer to Zadie Smith, invoking the association even whilst condemning the continued comparison.

The media coverage and paratextual elements of the novel combine to create a sense of Evans as similar to Smith, but a more specifically racialised version. It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which Evans had agency within these aspects of the marketing for *26a*, but it is apparent from interviews with the author that her sense of her racial identity was more assured than Smith's when *White Teeth* was initially published. When asked about the autobiographical aspects of *White Teeth,* Smith was reportedly 'prickly' when asked to concede that aspects of the novel were informed by her personal life.[13] Evans, however, was open about the autobiographical aspects of *26a*, the impetus for which developed from her experience of her own twin's suicide.

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[11] Wajid, 'Muse attacks? Retreat for a while to a more lackadaisical environment'.
[12] 'Rewriting the Wrongs', *New Nation*, 20 March 2006.
[13] Lynell George, 'Author Purposeful With Prose, Fidgety With Fame', *Los Angeles Times*, 26 June 2000 <http://articles.latimes.com/2000/jun/26/news/cl-44856> [accessed 18 March 2019].

> It's autobiographical. My twin passed away and that was like a thunderbolt which threw me into the writing because it made me realise that I didn't want to waste time with my life […] When I was writing the first draft it was much more autobiographical, but as time passed truth began to merge with fabrication and imagination.[14]

Unlike Smith, whose vexed relationship with the presentation of *White Teeth* as an autobiographical depiction of her own youth was often noted, there was a distinct lack of antagonism surrounding the publication of *26a* or the media drawn links between Evans' own life and the world of the novel. Sarah Brouillette argues that controversy surrounding the authenticity of non-white authors has become a key marketing strategy:

> As often as writers make such appeals [to authenticity] they are accused of lacking the authentic community connection that sells their work, and the controversies that arise from such charges tend to aid their literature's further circulation […] these fraught circumstances are encouraging minority writers to articulate agonized conceptions of their own labour.[15]

Following this argument, Evans' ease with discussing the personal nature of the novel and the sense of authenticity attached to the novel as a result of its proximity to Evans' own life story, may have also been a contributing factor to her more muted public popular reception.

[14] Bernardine Evaristo, 'Diana Evans in Conversation', *Wasafiri*, 20:45 (2005), 31-35 (p.33).
[15] Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy*, p.10.

Whilst there is a sense of discomfort in Evans' responses to the repeated refrain of being named 'the new Zadie Smith', she appears to accept her place within the emerging literary market for mixed race, multicultural fiction.[16] In an interview with *The Pulse*, Evans stated that she 'was excited to be part of the revival of black British women writers'[17] and she wrote an article about her complicated personal connection to Africa for *The Guardian* in 2006.[18] The readiness with which Evans accepted and embraced the label of a 'black British writer', as well as her open acknowledgement of her connection to Africa – Smith rarely mentioned any connection to Jamaica, the country of her mother's birth and Ali's lack of connection to the Bangladeshi community of *Brick Lane* was repeatedly reported upon – seem to have been contributing factors to her positioning within the market as a black writer, rather than a 'multicultural' author. The literary market at the time appeared to favour authors for whom notions of racial authenticity were vexed and who seemed reluctant to engage in conversations about their racial identity. Neither category applied to Evans, potentially mediating her appeal as a 'sexy' media figure and contributing to her designation as a black writer which can work as a limitation placed on audience reach and popular success.

Whilst publishers and the media hugely influence the ways in which authors and their work are positioned within the market, the critical response from academics also works to consecrate or challenge those early assignations and interpretations. In *The Postcolonial Exotic* Huggan raises the question of 'to what extent […] the academy collaborate[s] in similar processes of co-optation' to the media in exoticising and commodifying non-white authors, questioning the extent to which the field of literary criticism is complicit within 'the

[16] Saner, 'Don't call me the new Zadie Smith'.
[17] 'Double Take', *The Pulse.*
[18] Diana Evans, 'What took you so long', *The Guardian*, 1 September 2006 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/sep/02/featuresreviews.guardianreview> [accessed 18 March 2019].

alterity industry'.[19] The initial critical response to *26a* entrenched the idea of the novel as a black African text. Pilar Cuder-Dominguez reads *26a* alongside Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* as examples of a genre she terms as the 'Nigerian novel in English'.[20] Elleke Boehmer argues that Evans' work belongs to a global, diasporic African tradition in direct conversation with Chinua Achebe's work.[21] This interpretation is echoed in Irene Perez-Fernandez's article which draws parallels between Evans and contemporary Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.[22] Whereas Smith's work was considered alongside the work of Julian Barnes, as well as black British writers, and Monica Ali's work considered alongside Smith and Andrea Levy as part of a wider multicultural British oeuvre, Evans was almost unanimously considered as working within a genre of black African writing.[23] Corinne Fowler writes that 'academic studies of contemporary British writing should not mirror too closely the critical and commercial decisions of mainstream publishers' as, whilst academic interpretation has the power to challenge us to widen our interpretative frameworks, that power also works to consolidate our interpretations.[24] The tendency to position Evans as a black writer is validated and confirmed by academic readings of her novel that display the same inclination.

The links between Nigeria and African folklore are apparent within the novel, from the magical realism to the mythology surrounding Nigerian twins Ode and Onia. A portion of the narrative takes place in Nigeria as the family relocates for Aubrey's work and there are

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[19] Huggan, p.viii.
[20] Pilar Cuder-Dominguez, 'Double Consciousness in the Work of Helen Oyeyemi and Diana Evans', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 20:3 (2009), 277-286 (p.278).
[21] Elleke Boehmer, 'Achebe and His Influence in Some Contemporary African Writing', *Interventions*, 11:2 (2009), 141-153.
[22] Irene Perez-Fernandez, 'Embodying "twoness in oneness" in Diana Evans' *26a*', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 49:3 (2013), 291-302.
[23] Nick Bentley, 'Re-writing Englishness: Imagining the nation in Julian Barnes's England, England and Zadie Smith's White Teeth', *Textual Practice*, 21:3 (2007), 483-504; Irene Perez-Fernandez, 'Representing Third Spaces, Fluid Identities and Contested Spaces in Contemporary British Literature', *Atlantis*, 31:2 (December 2009), 143-160.
[24] Fowler, p.76.

references to Nigerian culture and traditions throughout the narrative. Whilst an interpretation of the novel that refers to these features is valid, critical attention that focuses solely on the ways in which Evans' novel sits outside of a 'British' tradition or location has the effect of further limiting what constitutes British literature and confirming the novel's otherness. In an interview with Bernardine Evaristo, Diana Evans stated:

> The idea of being mixed-race, or the idea of race itself, isn't as urgent to them as the idea of what it's like living with a dangerous father, or living with a distant mother. I went to a very mixed school with lots of black, Asian and white people and this has given me a different perspective, a different agenda. I want to write about human experiences and universal experiences rather than write about what it means to be black or mixed-race.[25]

For Evans, race is not the central theme of the novel, or indeed her own experience, but rather the family dynamics and difficult relationships between children and their parents. Her intention was to write about childhood trauma, grief and adolescence as commonplace human experiences. Perez-Fernandez refers to this statement at the beginning of her article, returning to it after a discussion of the conclusion of the novel:

> Her novel does not belong exclusively to British literature, Black literature or Nigerian literature but to all three and none at the same time. This aspect, therefore, defies Evans's claim to consider her novel as dealing with human experiences at a universal level.[26]

[25] Evaristo, p.33.
[26] Perez-Fernandez, 'Embodying "twoness in oneness" in Diana Evans' *26a*', p.295.

Perez-Fernandez disavows Evans' suggestion that the themes of the novel are 'universal' because of the magical realism aspects of the novel and the African folklore influences. The word 'universal' is problematic in this context, in the sense that all experience is subjective, but even more so in the assumption of what constitutes a 'universal' experience. Evaristo articulates the sense of discomfort that arises from the insistence that the narrative of *26a* is not a universal one when she states, 'I would argue that specifically black experiences - modes of being and modes of seeing - are as validly universal as any other experience'.[27] Perez-Fernandez's denial of the universality of Evans' text contributes to the idea that a black British perspective, or any non-white perspective, is irrevocably other and, by implication, suggests that any sense of a 'universal' experience is a white, Western one. This approach deliberately misunderstands Evans' use of the word universal; in the context of her remarks 'universal' functions as an assertion that there isn't anything extraordinary or other about her life experience or that of the Hunter family in *26a*. Perez-Fernandez's analysis interprets Evans' statement as a suggestion that her very specific experience of being a mixed race, British-African twin is a commonly shared one. This is simultaneously counter-intuitive in relation to the subjectivity of all experience, regardless of race, and damaging in the way that it reinforces prescriptive ideas about British national identity that present blackness as existing outside of an assumedly 'universal' white British experience. Perez-Fernandez's insistence upon reading the novel within a racialised framework continues to suggest that black or mixed-race authors are writing from a different perspective and that their characters have to be understood within a different, racialised framework to that white Britishness. Perez-Fernandez states explicitly that

[27] Evaristo, p.33.

> Evans's engagement with the theme of twins, and the references to Georgia's inhabitation into Bessi's body at the end of the novel, have to be understood not just as being grounded in her emotional experiences as a twin whose sister dies, but also as being imbued by Evans's cultural and ethnic background. She is the daughter of British and Nigerian parents and, consciously or unconsciously, brings to the fore traditional Nigerian cultural beliefs related to twins.[28]

Evans' own intentions for the novel, and her urging to read the novel outside of the parameters of race, are disregarded and replaced with critical insistence that the novel *cannot* be read outside of a racialised context.

There is a sense that this determination to read the novel within a framework of race has shifted across the past ten years. In her 2017 article, 'Cosmopolitan belonging in Diana Evans's *26a*', Samantha Reive Holland argues that:

> To read contemporary black British authors only as inheritors of a migrant sensibility based on racial experience is to devalue the important work that British-born, and often mixed-race, authors have done in recasting black British experience within an English framework.[29]

Reive Holland proposes that we shift our critical focus. Rather than viewing authors like Evans' in relation to diasporic traditions, she argues we should instead locate them within a global cosmopolitan framework that offers 'multifarious modes of being in the development of selfhood' as a result of increasing globalisation, rather than a confused or complicated

[28] Perez-Fernandez, 'Embodying "twoness in oneness" in Diana Evans' *26a*', p.294.
[29] Samantha Reive Holland, "Home had a way of shifting": Cosmopolitan belonging in Diana Evans's *26a*', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 53:5 (2017), 555-566, (p.556).

relationship with racialised national identity (p.556). As recent critical attention to Evans's work shows, as well as the reception of her latest novel *Ordinary People* as I shall argue later on, there appears to be a new openness to the idea that, as Evaristo stated, a black British perspective is just as valid a 'universal' lens.

The repeated comparison to Zadie Smith is interesting also in relation to the tone and content of *White Teeth* and *26a* and the ways in which the differences between the novels themselves may have contributed to Evans' more muted popular reception. Reviewers were eager to draw comparisons between the novels, particularly the ways in which the novels represented multicultural London.

> Their first books are, admittedly, similar - a story of interracial marriage and a set of twins, set against the backdrop of north-west London in the 1980s - but surely the comparison has more to do with them both being young, attractive black women than anything else. Does she find that particularly irritating?[30]

Whilst the journalist for the *Evening Standard* points out that the comparisons between Smith and Evans refer more to the ways in which their profiles are similar, she also asserts that the novels are 'similar'. Yet the novels are markedly different; *White Teeth* is a bombastic and polyvocal novel, whereas *26a* is much more intimate and insular. I argue that it is precisely the dissimilarity between the two works that has contributed to Evans' more muted success.

The review of *26a* in *The Herald* unsettlingly states that 'the multicultural tone is played well, neither dominating nor stereotyping a tale of childhood'.[31] As Bernardine Evaristo comments, in her interview with Evans, there is a noticeable lack of racialized

[30] Saner, 'Don't call me the new Zadie'.
[31] '26a', *The Herald*, 25 March 2006.

conflict in the novel, noting that 'there's an absence of racism in their lives'.[32] In this context, it seems as if the suggestion that the 'multicultural tone is played well' is in reference to this lack of racial conflict. That unlike its black British predecessors, or *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane*, there are no moments of overt racism or any suggestion that Britain's 'multicultural' populations are marginalised. Where *White Teeth* exposes enduring racial tensions and *Brick Lane* references race riots and alludes to the tense cultural climate post 9/11, *26a* is devoid of any overt commentary on multiculturalism or race relations in the UK, focusing on family tension rather than societal tension. It is apparent from the response to *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* that the texts and their authors functioned as both conduits in 'nation branding strategies' that presented Britain as a 'nation of happily multicultural communities',[33] and also as insiders that reveal 'hidden worlds'.[34] *26a* cannot be reconciled within a framework of multiculturalism in the same way as its focus is determinedly inward facing, 'a tale of childhood', little concerned with larger scale social and race relations. Whilst there is evidently a desire for texts that are exciting and controversial, as evidenced by the furore surrounding *Brick Lane,* the hostile responses to Smith and Ali's attempts to criticise the ways in which they were represented - as discussed in previous chapters - indicate that their authors are required to play the multicultural tone 'well' and comply with the celebratory narrative of multiculturalism constructed around their personas, even if only to incite further controversy.

This is thought-provoking in light of the novels that found success within this period. As stated above, the popular novels published before *26a* all featured racial conflict in some form. *White Teeth* considers the ways in which racism mutates across the generations and, as Mike Phillips argues, 'took the meeting between cultures as the platform for exploring the

[32] Evaristo, p.33.
[33] Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy*, p.4.
[34] Ali, *Brick Lane*, back cover.

identity of Britain itself.'[35] *The Impressionist*, whilst a historical novel, follows a young mixed-race man as he attempts to pass as white in colonial Britain and the psychological damage it causes him. *Brick Lane* details a clash of cultures and generations amidst escalating racial tensions and the aftermath of 9/11. This change in tone and context, combined with the personal insularity of Evans' text, has perhaps contributed to *26a*'s more muted popularity. The trend for 'multicultural' fiction at this time was particularly invested in reading about multicultural Britain as a space of tension and cultural collision, echoing the suggestion in Fowler's article that publishers are only interested in novels from non-white authors that deal with conflict and violence. As a consequence, this conditioned a reading audience for whom racial anxiety was a prerequisite selling point of books by non-white authors at the start of the millennium. Unlike the quote at the beginning of this chapter, it is the fact that *26a* does not in fact 'chart multicultural life in London' that has potentially impeded its popularity.

It is not simply the content of the novels that differ but also the tone of the novels. The scope of *White Teeth* and *The Impressionist* is expansive, the tone of both novels overblown and comedic, combining incisive critique with exaggerated humour. *White Teeth* in particular presents a sense of multiculturalism that is 'vibrant', noisy and bombastic. Whilst the world of *Brick Lane* is a more subdued, serious affair it has a very dramatic tone and plotline, with caricaturistic characters such as Chanu providing light relief and Smith/Kunzru-esque farce. *26a* lacks this sense of bombastic multiculturalism or dramatic storylines: its story is intimate and personal, both in a sense that it is based on the novelist's own history, but also in the way in which the narrative immerses the reader in the world of the twins. *White Teeth*, *The Impressionist* and *Brick Lane* are all novels that display an outward facing preoccupation and anxiety with British multicultural society and race

[35] Mike Phillips, 'Postcolonial endgame', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 52:1 (2016), 6-12 (p.9).

relations, whereas *26a* is a novel whose anxiety is focused inwards and, as such, it fails to fit into the very specific genre of the early noughties' multicultural novel. As Fowler states in her reading of *White Teeth* against that of Joe Pemberton's *Forever and Ever Amen*, 'the fetishization of authors like Smith can be understood as a form of multiculturalism that discriminates more keenly than it rewards'.[36]

It is also significant that the authors published after the phenomenon of *White Teeth* were comparable to Smith, yet also distinctive. As shown in the construction of Smith, Kunzru and Ali's authorial personas, there is repeated emphasis on the 'freshness' and 'newness' of their voices and stories, even the suggestion that their mixed-race backgrounds were a recent change in British demographics. Their mixed-race backgrounds provided a marketable commonality, yet each of Smith's successors provided a fresh take on the sense of multiculturalism that Smith offered: Hari Kunzru's mixed-race Indian background intersected with the boom in 'Asian Cool' and Ali's mixed-race Bangladeshi heritage provided a fertile battleground for conflicts over racial identity. In contrast, Evans' authorial persona does not provide anything 'new' in marketing terms, precisely because her profile too closely resembles that of Smith. There is a sense that *Brick Lane* and *The Impressionist* offered readers an insight into different and, more importantly, 'new' worlds, in large part because the racial identities of the authors deviated from that of Smith's. The connections between Smith and Evans' however are *too* similar, both in relation to their authorial persona and the racial identity of their protagonists, a suggestion that Evans' offers nothing new, no fresh perspective.

The culture of the celebrity multicultural author encouraged readers to think of the experience of reading these novels as definitive insights into different races and cultures, an opportunity to learn about what it 'means' to be Asian or mixed race. The consequence of

[36] Fowler, p.85.

this is the sense that, having read *White Teeth*, the reader has already learnt about what it means to be mixed race or read the definitive mixed-race novel, a suggestion that Evans' novel is offering more of the same.

Mark Stein argues that 'the question of categorization is always a political one' because the 'political implications of inclusion and exclusion remain'.[37] What is at stake within some of the questions that arise from comparing Smith's success and positioning within the marketplace to that of Evans? What are the implications of presenting Zadie Smith as mixed and multicultural, yet aligning Evans with a black and African tradition? There are both political and economic consequences to being included within a genre of internationalised multicultural British fiction as opposed to a black British writer. Zadie Smith in particular – and to a slightly lesser extent Hari Kunzru – has achieved international fame; she now lives in New York and is considered a definitively British voice and export. *White Teeth*'s impact still resonates almost twenty years later, is still included in front of house displays in bookstores and Smith has accrued an increasingly prominent global profile. In contrast, *26a* had a much smaller impact: it won multiple book awards and critical acclaim yet never reached the zeitgeist-creating heights of *White Teeth* and a recent trip to a large book retailer revealed that is difficult to find a copy of Evans' first two novels on the shelves.

Whilst both Smith and Evans were positioned through a racialised lens, the perception of Smith as 'more' multicultural – interpreted here as exotic, light-skinned, racially ambiguous – is in stark contrast to the emphasis placed on Evans' African heritage and the ways in which her novel is located within a black literary tradition. There is a sense in which Smith's work was presented in terms that, whilst racialised, were still indelibly British in a manner which was repeatedly denied to Evans' work, perpetuating the idea that blackness exists outside of, and separate to, Britishness. It is impossible to ascertain the extent to which

[37] Stein, p.xv.

the physical appearance of Evans and Smith contributes to this discourse, yet it is significant that the lighter-skinned, less identifiably black mixed-race figure has been the one to achieve the wider success.

26A, 2005

In a similar way to which the tone of *26a* does not cohere with the expectations of multicultural mixed-race fiction, as determined by the success of Smith and Ali, neither does the content of the novel. *26a* follows mixed-race twins Georgia and Bessi as they grow up in north west London with their two sisters and parents. The Hunters are an interracial family made up of white British father Aubrey from Derbyshire and black Nigerian mother Ida, and the novel follows the family as the girls grow up and the relationship between Aubrey and the rest of his family steadily deteriorates. The reader is introduced to the twins before birth in a magical realist opening, following them until the age of 25, a few months after Georgia commits suicide. Academic interpretations of the novel often refer to the novel in relation to Mark Stein's black British bildungsroman framework.[38] Stein defines many of the novels of this early noughties period – including the work of authors such as Zadie Smith, Bernardine Evaristo and Andrea Levy - as 'black British novels of transformation' that follow young black and mixed-race adolescents coming of age in a socio-political climate where British culture was shifting 'under the influence of "outsiders within"'.[39] In Stein's definition the development of the character happens alongside a redefinition of British society;

[38] Cuder-Dominguez (2009), Perez-Fernandez (2013).
[39] Stein, p.xiii.

> The black British novel of transformation, it is argued here, is about the formation of its protagonists – but, importantly, it is also about the transformation of British society and cultural institutions (ibid).

A 'black British novel of transformation' is therefore one in which the protagonists' formation catalyses a reformation of the society around them, creating a new mode of Britishness. Whilst *26a* fits comfortably within the framework of a bildungsroman, it is not entirely convincing that the novel sits within Stein's parameters. McLeod also argues against this categorisation of *26a* as a black British novel of transformation;

> Although a novel about youthful development, it seems distinctly removed from the Black British bildungsroman of the 1980s and 1990s. The twins are not depicted struggling primarily with their identities as mixed-race Britons; the novel does not overtly explore the problems of a Black British community; the London of the novel is not a visibly prejudicial or discriminatory environment.[40]

The twins' identity - their sense of racial identity, but more so their individual identities outside of their twin-ness – shift throughout the novel as they grow older, yet there is no evidence to suggest that any similar development or change is mirrored in the wider British society of the novel. As stated above, this is in part because in the world of *26a* there is no pressing need for outward societal change as the Hunters are perfectly at home in London and experience little resistance to their presence. In relation to the success of novels within this period, Stein also argues that

[40] McLeod, 'Extra dimensions, new routines', p.47.

> The process of "coming of age" traditionally associated with the novel of formation is here understood in a double sense. On the thematic level, novels of formation depict the process of growing up. On other levels, a *performative function* can be ascribed to these fictions in that they are not only inscribed by the cultures they inhabit: the texts in turn mold these very cultures.[41]

White Teeth and *Brick Lane* had a palpable effect on British contemporary society: they created a market for other non-white authors and texts and catalysed debates about authenticity and the enforced racialisation of authors within the media. The publication of *26a,* however, was much more muted, featured no attention-grabbing controversy and as such did not appear to make as profound an impact. Marketing the novel as another *White Teeth* classified the text, and its author, within a field of black Britishness that sits outside of normative, white British experience and fiction. As such, the critical reception of the novel mediated the transformative potential of the novel. Had critics interpreted the novel as a un-racialised exploration of adolescence and grief, rather than insisting on reading the novel as an exploration of multicultural Britain, perhaps it could have wielded this transformative power of making race seem incidental rather than central to our ways of reading novels and our perception of the wider world. That power is stymied, however, by insistence upon marking the novel as other; black and African rather than British.

Racial and cultural identity are at the centre of *White Teeth*, *The Impressionist* and *Brick Lane*, particularly mixed-race identity in the case of the first two. Critics of *26a* have also been preoccupied with race, with interpreting the novel through the lens of race, particularly preoccupied by the idea of mixed-race twins Georgia and Bessi representing a fragmented and conflicted racial identity. Cuder-Dominguez reads the twins as 'powerful

[41] Stein, p.xvi.

portraits of a mixed-raced subject who is actively engaged in coming to terms with the 'double' nature of their Black British identity.'[42] She interprets the twins as a metaphor for feelings of racial inferiority:

> The figure of the doppelganger or 'racial shadow' has been a fixture of many contemporary immigrant novels, usually by way of suggesting either the subject's feelings of inferiority, haunted by an essential lack in authenticity, or else the missing connections to the homeland (p.279).

Perez-Fernandez similarly reads the twinship aspect of the novel as a metaphor for a reconciliation of a fractured identity:

> If twinship is a powerful metaphor for the in-between – never complete, never fixed – position where diasporic identities are located, becoming a singleton can be metaphorically read as bringing to an end such in-betweenness. […] Bessi adapts that [Nigerian] tradition to her new situation as a means of reducing the sense of incompleteness, halving and biracialism.[43]

Both interpretations of the novel read twinness as a symbol for mixed race, which in these terms is configured as a space of anxiety, inauthenticity and inferiority. Cuder-Dominguez and Perez-Fernandez read doubleness as a symbol of a mixed-race identity and the twins' struggle to develop individual identities as a reconciliation of innate feelings of inferiority and a lack of belonging. Cuder-Dominguez goes so far as to suggest that Georgia's suicide

[42] Cuder-Dominguez, p.280.
[43] Perez-Fernandez, 'Embodying "twoness in oneness" in Diana Evans' *26a*', p. 300.

reflects a 'succumb[ing] to her own doubleness',[44] that the inability to reconcile her mixed-race identity results in death. Brenda Cooper is critical of this interpretation of twinness and what she sees as the critical tendency to read the trope of twins as 'a coded language for the writer's own splitting, doubling and questing for their [black British] identities'.[45] This trope has even more worrying consequences in relation to mixed-race identity, which has often been pathologised as a site of fragmented, conflicted identity. In both of these readings, mixed-race identity is aligned with trauma, as something that needs to be urgently reconciled, proliferating the idea that to be mixed race is to feel innately incomplete or inferior.

This sense of mixed-race identity is also present in *White Teeth* and *The Impressionist*; Irie suffers a racial identity trauma that results in her destroying her hair and Pran's identity confusion and desire to pass as white result in his ruin. The critical response to *26a* suggests a common association of mixed-race identity with a sense of racial inferiority and a lack of belonging, a propensity towards interpreting mixed race within those parameters. This inclination is reflected in the bestselling fiction at the start of the millennium, suggesting that not only did novels that were popular within this period have to display an anxiety in regard to racial tensions at a societal level, but also an anxiety over race at an individual level. Both Smith and Kunzru's novels suggest that being mixed race is a space of trauma and angst, their characters are at odds, both physically and psychologically, with their raciality and the mixed-race figure is a site of anxiety, as well as a space through which multiple discourses of race are communicated. In this climate, representations of mixed-race identity came to the marketplace overdetermined and loaded with negative connotations, conditioning societal ideas about mixed-race identity that have led to the continued interpretation of the mixed-race figure as an unstable one. It is apparent from the

[44] Cuder-Dominguez, p.284.
[45] Brenda Cooper, 'Diaspora, gender and identity: twinning in three diasporic novels', *English Academy Review*, 25:1 (2008), 51– 65 (p.52).

interpretation of *26a* that the tendency is to interpret mixed-race identity as unreconciled and the implication is that racial identity is something that should always be approached as a site of conflict, as an issue, proliferating the sense of race as a problem to be overcome.

It seems that both the literary marketplace and the critical field were invested in this iteration of mixed-race identity. Whilst Cuder-Dominguez and Perez-Fernandez present interesting interpretations of the novel this is not the only narrative of mixed race that the novel makes available. In contrast to the dominant analysis of the novel, I argue that the mixed-race identities of the twins, and their sisters, in *26a* are assured and unconflicted, reflecting what Arana has termed a '"centred" self' and offering a critical alternative to established narratives of mixedness.[46] One of the most commented upon sections of the novel describes the ways in which Ida and Aubrey's heritages are reflected in the house:

> From the top of the stairs an eyeless black mask with a freakish mane of straw hair 'protected them,' Ida said, from the evil that was everywhere. (For goodness sake, thought Aubrey.) And finally, for the living room, Aubrey chose, very carefully, a large-scale tapestry of the Derbyshire dales. They were colliding, silently, through geography.[47]

The house becomes a demarcated space as Ida and Aubrey's marriage disintegrates, one of violence and tension, where Ida's spiritual Nigerian heritage is often at odds with Aubrey's pragmatic British upbringing. This sense of collision and conflict, however, is not apparent within the children themselves who integrate these two homelands without tension. When Bel

[46] R. Victoria Arana, 'Sea Change: Historicizing the Scholarly Study of Black British Writing', in *Black British Writing*, ed. by R. Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 19 - 45 (p.31).

[47] Diana Evans, *26a* (London: Vintage, 2006), p.38.

is born, she acts as a unifier and vehicle of reconciliation: 'She surprised them both for the canyons of love a child can throw open. She had Ida's temper and Judith's green eyes' (p.37). The Hunter children act as a space of common ground and a physical embodiment of the integration of Ida and Aubrey's identities, children who make the best of what both cultures have to offer by creating new modes of being and 'rice sandwich[es]' (p.23).

Initially apprehensive about the family move to Nigeria, the twins worried about growing older and becoming 'foreign':

> 'Will we be Nigerians?' Bessi asked her mother, sitting next to Kemy on a suitcase that Ida was trying to zip closed. […] She paused to answer Bessi's question: 'What do you mean? You are Nigerian now,' she said. 'But only half,' Bessi pointed out. 'If we live there, will we be *all* Nigerian?' (p.44).

This section demonstrates Bessi's awareness of a sense of difference and a sense of being removed from their African heritage, yet is suggestive of curiosity more than any anxiety. Evans gives the sense here that the Hunter children have internalised the societal fixation upon racial categorisation and the need to definitively know where they are from, yet their sense of Britishness is palpable. They ask the question of whether the move to Nigeria will make them Nigerian, suggesting that they think of themselves as British primarily and displaying a sense of belonging. This is further strengthened once the twins are settled in 26a deciding how Nigerian they shall be: 'Eyes closed, lips concentrating, Bessi spoke first: 'Not all, so that we can go home in 1984.' 'Yes,' said Georgia. 'But a bit very, because that's still a long time' (p.58). The twins' decision to not become too Nigerian is based on the concern that they may not be able to come home afterwards, implying a consciousness that belonging is tenuous in Britain but a certainty that it is home. The act of weighing out the decision is

significant, however, as it demonstrates their own conviction that their racial identity is their choice. It demonstrates a confidence that they belong in both places and exert agency over their racial identification in contrast to representations of mixed-race subjects as out of place, and belonging as a factor that is externally decided upon.

The transition to life in Nigeria is a relatively easy one and after a few weeks of homesickness, where the twins returned to the loft in their dreams, they adjust to their new life in Africa:

> For home has a way of shifting, of changing shape and temperature. Home was homeless. It could exist anywhere, because its only substance was familiarity. If it was broken by long journeys or tornadoes it emerged again, reinvented itself with new décor, new idiosyncrasies of morning, noon and dusk, and old routines (p.53).

Rather than feeling displaced, the twins are as at home in Nigeria as they in London. Even though 'guavas had replaced apples' and 'hibiscuses had replaced roses', the Hunter children adapt to their new environment and Evans presents home as a space where routines remain the same even if the context changes. Everyday life in Nigeria is as ordinary as everyday life in Britain, thereby detaching it from notions of otherness (p.54). Rather than the connection to Nigeria suggesting a conflicted or fractured identity, it in fact suggests an integrated identity. Whereas blackness is often the locus of tension and self-hatred in representations of mixed-race identity, the twins are at ease with their blackness and at home in Nigeria. The idea of home shifting is representative of the mixed-race subject being at home in either a predominantly white British setting or a black African one, rather than a sense of being homeless or dislocated. Georgia and Bessi's twinship does not represent an unreconciled identity because there is no division to be resolved.

26a suggests that any conflict over mixed-race identity is an external issue. The twins' first traumatic experience regarding their mixed-race identity occurs when they visit a white hairdresser 'not up to the challenges posed by afros': 'The trimming of an afro required an understanding of roundness, which needed to be applied to the scissors. Mandy, the older daughter, snipped at Bessi's hair for a very long time, looking confused' (p.41). In a reversal of the scene in *White Teeth,* where Irie attempts to manage the problem her afro hair poses, the twins are at ease with their afros and it is the outside interference of a white hairdresser that renders their hair a problematic site. Unable to 'understand' the needs or beauty of an afro, Mandy literally 'snips' away at that foundation to leave the twins traumatised. There is a sense within the novel that the twins have to figure out their place in the world and understand, rather than reconcile, their racial identity. Evans seems to suggest that they have internalised the idea that blackness/Nigerian-ness exists in opposition to Britishness, yet their sense Britishness is innate and unquestioned. Continuing to approach the interpretation of mixed race within the novel from the position that it is a problematic, extraordinary site is a deliberate choice, as it is certainly not the only interpretation that the novel makes available.

ORDINARY PEOPLE (2018)

This commitment to rendering race ordinary that is hinted at in *26a*, is developed explicitly in Evans' latest novel *Ordinary People*. After a nine-year break between the publication of her second novel, *The Wonder,* in 2009, Evans' third novel was published in 2018. The novel is an intricate exploration of marriage, middle age and life south of the river in London for two couples, Melissa and Michael and Damien and Stephanie. Each chapter follows a particular couples' narratives, alternatively describing family life in outer London (Melissa and Michael) and the suburbs (Damien and Stephanie); interestingly, Stephanie, the sole white

member of the foursome, is the only perspective the reader is not offered. The narrative follows Melissa and Michael as Melissa adapts to staying at home with the children, instead of her previous role as a magazine editor in the city, and Damien as he deals with his estranged father's death and his growing disenchantment with life in the Home Counties. Both couples are dissatisfied within their long-term relationship/marriage and the novel examines middle-class protagonists approaching middle age and deeply questioning what they want within the next stage of their lives.

Ordinary People is a novel that is at once an exploration of black British life and identity and yet at the same time a recognisably familiar narrative of middle age and marriage in contemporary society. James Procter argues that 'the habitual, the mundane and the taken-for-granted are all performing, or capable of performing, important cultural tasks after empire'.[48] Representations of minorities that align their everyday lives with that of the white majority culture are a process 'by which we become indifferent to difference' and 'a crucial part of the postcolonial project' (p.78). With reference to Procter's notion of the 'postcolonial everyday', this section of the chapter will examine the ways in which Diana Evans roots representations of blackness and mixedness within the mundanity of family life, to blur the boundaries between blackness and whiteness in a manner that transcends race. I argue that the world of *Ordinary People* is one in which race, specifically blackness, is a focal lens of the narrative without being the focus point of it.

The hardback edition of the novel advertises this contrast of extraordinary ordinariness; the dust jacket is a brightly coloured mix of images of London/urban geography – road maps, telephone towers – rendered in vibrant colours and interspersed with patterns reminiscent of African cloth, akin to the covers of *Brick Lane* and *White Teeth*. The title of the novel refers to this sense of commonplaceness, to the overarching exploration of daily

[48] James Procter, 'The postcolonial everyday', *New Formations*, 58 (2006), 62-80 (p.64).

family life and relationships within the novel, whilst also referencing music by black artists – specifically that of African-American soul singer John Legend. Music is a continuous theme within the novel and one which is intrinsically identified with black British identity and narratives. In discussing the impact of historically black forms of music on wider British culture, Stuart Hall argued that 'the leading role of rap, jungle and drum-and-base [*sic*]' is not only 'an expressive moment in black British urban culture, but […] an arena of crossover, of desire, as part of the culture of working-class and middle-class white wannabees'.[49] He posits that music by black artists is not only integral to formations of black British identity, but that it has become a fundamental aspect of white British national identity as well.

Hall's conception of black music as an 'arena of crossover' is interesting to consider in relation to Evans' novel and the ways in which it works towards presenting a sense of black Britishness that is ordinary. Hall refers to the ways in which black culture has been appropriated by white working and middle-class cultures, as well as the ways in which blackness is fetishised, yet also identifies the potential of black music as a vehicle of change and 'crossover'. The marketing campaign for the novel included an open access Spotify playlist of the songs referenced throughout the book, as well as the distribution of headphones that featured the book's cover design on the case. The Penguin website also featured an article entitled 'The Soundtrack to Diana Evans' Ordinary People' which stated:

> Originally called 'Bell Green', after the area in which it is set in south London, the novel later changed its name in acknowledgement of this major salute to music, that song in particular containing for my purposes not just an accurate reflection of the

[49] Stuart Hall, 'Aspiration and Attitude…Reflections on Black Britain in the Nineties', *New Formations*, 33 (Winter 1997), 38-46 (pp.43, 44).

> conflicting phases of love, but also a necessary normalising of the very idea of black love and indeed black people – unexotic, unfascinating, un-other, simply ordinary.[50]

The paratextual elements of the headphones and the Spotify playlist, as well as the decision to change the name of the novel to a direct music reference, encourage the reader to immerse themselves in the soundtrack of the novel, as well as what the music represents: black culture, black love and a black British community that is different without being 'other'. Music, within the novel, becomes a space of 'crossover' where blackness is normalised, functioning as a space of exchange for a presumed, primarily white, literary fiction readership.

This is most notably signalled by the prominence of John Legend's *Get Lifted* album within the narrative, the title of the novel referring to Legend's breakthrough hit. Legend is an African-American artist whose album is a pop/R&B hybrid that features numerous piano ballads, as well as collaborations with Snoop Dogg and Kanye West. He is the epitome of a crossover black artist and his hit song, *Ordinary People,* embodies Evans' project entirely. John Legend epitomises this space of crossover and provides fertile ground for a project whose aim is to redefine the narrative around blackness; rather than limiting black expression to rap and hip-hop, Legend's album both incorporates, and softens, stereotypical black music expression within an album of smooth R&B vocals and piano ballads, at once acknowledging 'urban' music as integral to black expression but also broadening, and challenging, the expectations attached to it. Evans' writing style also seems to cohere with this aim; the dust jacket of the novel proclaims Evans is a 'lyrical and glorious writer', 'a precise poet' and 'intellectual and insightful', this style of literary fiction typically marketed at a presumed

[50] Penguin website for *Ordinary People* <https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/features/2018/mar/ordinary-people-playlist/> [accessed 30 June 2018].

white, middle-class audience.[51] The novel is driven by the detailed examination of relationships between middle-class black people, rather than by a fast-paced plot or narrative that features gang violence, street culture or drugs. The exploration of blackness in this context, and in this style, has the effect of reimagining the language through which black Britishness is communicated and made ordinary.

Evans' approach to normalising blackness appears to have been successful. In contrast to reviews of *26a*, which focussed on the ways in which the novel was 'multicultural' or 'sexy'[52] - often in opposition to the novel's own lack of interest in thinking about race or multiculturalism - reviews of *Ordinary People* have focussed on the ways in which the novel demonstrates the normality of blackness. *The Guardian* review commented that 'if *Ordinary People* is about compromise, it is also about how we live today and, refreshingly, Evans shows this through the prism of black and mixed-race identities, conjuring an urban milieu that is middle-class and non-white'.[53] Whilst the reviewer acknowledges that race is an integral aspect of the novel, it discusses the novel as a reflection of the way in which 'we' live today. Although the 'we' the reviewer is referring to is a presumably white, middle class 'we', and it is problematic to think of a black middle-class perspective as something that is new or 'refreshing', it is a radical space within which to align, and consider, a novel about black Britons, suggesting a progression from readings of *26a* which focussed on the ways the novel was different to normative middle-class whiteness. The review in the *Financial Times* further suggests the success with which Evans has achieved this space of crossover:

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[51] Diana Evans, *Ordinary People* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2018), back cover.
[52] Wajid, 'Muse attacks? Retreat for a while to a more lackadaisical environment'.
[53] Arifa Akbar, 'Ordinary People by Diana Evans review – magnificence and marital angst', *The Guardian*, 11 April 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/apr/11/ordinary-people-diana-evans-review-couples-marital-angst-black-mixed-race> [accessed 19 March 2019].

> The fact of race is always there in the novel — Melissa, Michael and Damian variously reflect on their heritage — but there is something radical in how Evans depicts the ordinary lives of young black people, faithfully, fully and quietly. When Michael strolls through a part of south London, he reflects passingly on the "menace" behind the flag of St George and feels a "never-ending sorrow for Stephen". Evans doesn't need to complete the name because she knows that we already know it and that the murder of a young black teenager forms part of the fabric of our ordinary life, too. It's an utterly piercing moment.[54]

In a publishing climate where 'publishers are happier with [black] novels that deal with race' in ways which 'are connected to expectations regarding the novel's performance of "blackness"', via gang violence and economically deprived urbanity, Evans' depiction of middle class, ordinary blackness is a radical perspective.[55] The sense of universality present in *The Guardian* review is repeated here; although the Stephen Lawrence murder has a particular significance to Michael, and is more present in his everyday life, it is presented as a part of 'our' shared British history, a past that all British people have to reckon with. Reviews of the novel tend to share this sense of race as central to the novel, without being the centre of it, and of blackness and black history as a perspective that is universal rather than irreconcilably different or set apart from normative, white middle-class existence. Mirroring Samantha Reive Holland's 2017 reading of *26a,* and its invocative awareness of the need to move away from thinking about non-white authors within a framework of race, recent

[54] Shahidha Bari, 'Ordinary People by Diana Evans – beat generation', *Financial Times*, 13 April 2018 <https://www.ft.com/content/dee6e8b8-3bdc-11e8-bcc8-cebcb81f1f90> [accessed 19 March 2019].
[55] Fowler, p.85.

reviews of *Ordinary People* emphasise the novel's ordinariness and present the characters as firmly rooted within a framework of Britishness, rather than outside of it.

Whilst Evans' intention is to use black music as a way of rendering blackness ordinary, communicating it through a language and context different to that through which blackness has often been discussed, the association of the novel with black music simultaneously utilises established tropes of blackness as a marketing tool. It is unclear from Evans' statement on the Penguin website whose decision it was to change the title from a London place name to *Ordinary People* and, whilst the new name does reflect the influence of music within the novel and Evans' own professed aims, it also has the effect of associating her and the novel within an established trope of blackness. The *Ordinary People* Spotify playlist is reminiscent of the promotional campaign for Courttia Newland's 1999 novel, *Society Within*, about an estate in London, which was distributed alongside a CD of urban black music. Newland's novel was firmly established within the recognised framework of the black British genre, featuring urban estates, drug dealing, street culture and black music, associated with a soundtrack of rap, R&B and grime music. In doing so, it seems as though publishers are continuing to trade on the sense of ineffable coolness and difference that this creates in order to promote its black authors, perpetuating the often negative connection between crime, social depravation, music and blackness. This is complicated by the importance of black music within Evans' narrative and the ways in which she speaks against these stereotypes, however, a marketing campaign that distributes branded headphones runs the risk of re-invoking those associations. The contradiction between Evans' approach to utilising black music as a space for rewriting the narrative of blackness, and the ways in which her publishers seem to have encouraged an association with stereotypical identifiers of blackness, illustrates Hall's idea of black music culture as a space that is at once exploited and yet retains the potential for exchange and crossover.

The novel is framed by, and embedded within, narratives of black British identity in ways that are both familiar and destabilised throughout the text. It begins with a description of a party in which the main characters are introduced through the familiar lens of black British identity - black coolness and street culture. When Michael and Melissa enter, they walk into the 'Wiley throng' of the party, echoed by the sounds of classic R&B and hip-hop artists such as Q-Tip and Faith Evans, the climax of the night heralded by a 'synchronised […] two-step' to Michael Jackson's *P.Y.T.*[56]

> Among them were a couple, Melissa and Michael, who arrived in a red Toyota saloon. […] He was tall and broad, with a thin, stubbled jaw and pretty eyes, the hair shaved close to the skull so as to almost disappear […] He wore loose black jeans with a sleek grey shirt, a pair of smart trainers […]. Melissa was wearing a mauve silk dress with a flashing boho hem, lime green lattice wedge sandals […] and her afro was arranged in a sequence of diagonal corn rows at the front with the rest left free though tamed with a palmful of S-Curl gel (p.3).

Melissa and Michael embody the sense of effortless cool and trendiness embedded within established markers of blackness such as trainers and afros. The description is at once one that could be applied to any hip, fashionable couple in a London novel – 'boho' style, a smart shirt paired with trainers – and one that is specifically black in its reference to 'cornrows' and 'S-Curl gel'.

In 'Aspiration and Attitudes…Reflections on Black Britain in the Nineties', Hall argued that blackness had become '*the* defining force in street-oriented British youth culture',

[56] Evans, *Ordinary People*, p.4.

epitomised through the 'enforced glamour, enforced sexuality, [of] the black body'.[57] Whilst it appears that Evans is echoing this through the sense of desire and coolness attached to their physicality, this is mediated through more prosaic references: 'together they displayed an ordinary, transient beauty – they were a pair to turn a head, though in close proximity their faces revealed shadows, dulled, imperfect teeth and the first lines'.[58] They arrive at the party in a generic, family car and whilst Michael leaves the party hopeful that the night will end in intimacy, he is disappointed as Melissa's 'power[ful]' and 'sinew[y]' (p.22) body disappears beneath a 'stiff, long nightdress' (p.23). Here Evans both acknowledges, and reconfigures, established models of black British identity; her protagonists are desirable, but in a way that is 'ordinary' and temporal. Her description draws attention to the ways in which blackness is viewed as glamourous, yet, in 'close proximity', is as ordinary as family cars, tired complexions and the aging process of middle age. The over-sexualised representation of blackness, both in terms of the fetishisation of the black body, and the idea of the hyper-sexual nature of black people, is alluded to and yet disavowed as the night ends without intimacy, in a scene of sexual stagnation familiar to narratives of middle-age marriage. Evans' narrative presents blackness as something that is desirable and attractive yet contextualises it in a way that renders it familiar rather than other.

In *After Empire*, Paul Gilroy argues that ' creative […] thinking is needed to generate more complex and challenging narratives' and representations of difference, 'which can be faithful to the everyday patterns of heterocultural metropolitan life by reducing the exaggerated dimensions of racial difference to a liberating ordinariness'.[59] Evans presents Michael and Melissa through terms that are at once specific to representations of black Britishness, yet are also firmly rooted in an everyday, normative and familiar narrative of

[57] Hall, 'Aspiration and Attitudes…Reflections on Black Britain in the Nineties', pp.40, 41.
[58] Evans, *Ordinary People*, p.4.
[59] Gilroy, *After Empire*, p.131.

middle age. It is clear from Evans' narrative, especially through the perspective of black British male Michael, that to inhabit Britain as a black person is a different experience than that of a white person, or even a mixed-race person, yet the more communal aspects of his experience – dissatisfaction with a waning sex life, the routine of his daily commute – are the defining features of his narrative. It is these experiences and issues that the novel suggests as collective points of connection.

The novel is particularly interesting in the ways in which it foregrounds racial identity, whilst simultaneously blurring the stark boundaries that are often constructed between whiteness and blackness. Evans avoids using words such as white or black in her description of the characters and it is difficult to ascertain their racial identity as it is never explicitly discussed. This feeling of the indeterminacy about the racial identity of the characters within the novel is reflected in reviews of the novel; whilst one reviewer in *The Guardian* refers to the 'black and mixed-race identities'[60] of the protagonists, another review within the same publication refers to the protagonists as 'two black couples in their 30s'.[61] It is noteworthy that there is no consensus on the racial identity of the characters, particularly in relation to the ways in which blackness and whiteness are demarcated as entirely separate identities within contemporary British society. The indecision over the racial identity of the characters is indicative of the successful ways in which Evans blurs the boundaries between blackness and whiteness to the point at which is it difficult to differentiate between the two.

Black British, by way of Jamaican parents, Michael is the most explicitly racialised character in the novel. He is described as having 'wide, basketball-player shoulders' with 'lines of a […] paler tone' marking the 'dark background' of his back as though 'in a former

[60] Akbar, 'Ordinary People by Diana Evans review – magnificence and marital angst'.
[61] Hannah Beckerman, 'Ordinary People review – a deft portrait of marital angst', *The Guardian*, 25 March 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/mar/25/diana-evans-ordinary-people-review> [accessed 19 March 2019].

life, he had been whipped.'[62] Evans remarks upon the 'brilliant whiteness of his matching boomerang smile' and, whilst it is clear that Michael is a black man, this is alluded to through references to blackness rather than explicitly stated. Evans refers to basketball, whip marks and white smiles against a dark background to encapsulate Michael's racial identity and aspects of his experience. Her words evoke stereotypical associations with blackness, as well as the historic exploitation and racism faced by black people in Britain, yet the word black is never used. Evans' prose seems determined to resist the language of race that continues to erect barriers within contemporary society. Once again, Michael's black male body – so often envisioned as a hyper-sexualised or threatening space - is mediated through a prosaic domestic setting, as this description unfolds as he 'fold[s] his jeans' in preparation for bed.

Whilst blackness is explicitly implicit in the description of Michael, the racial identity of mixed-race characters Melissa and Damien is more elusive. The reader primarily experiences Melissa's physicality through the eyes of Michael who refers to her throughout the novel in terms of her 'brownness', the neutrality of which demonstrates her non-whiteness without providing any specific information. Like Georgia and Bessi in *26a*, her relationship with the 'homeland'– Nigeria – remains uncomplicated throughout the novel, signified by a strong relationship with her mother, her spiritual beliefs and her connection to Nigerian food and culture, as well as her emotional connection with African-American musicians like Jill Scott (p.169). Blackness is the primary lens through which the reader, and Michael, views Melissa and it isn't until partway through the novel that Melissa's mixed race is revealed as a side note in a conversation with her daughter about her racial identity:

> 'No, you're a quarter Nigerian, a quarter English and a half Jamaican.'
>
> 'Why?'

[62] Evans, *Ordinary People*, p.25.

> ‘Because I’m half Nigerian and half English, and Daddy’s completely Jamaican’ (p.110).

Whilst it can conceivably be assumed that ‘English’ refers to white in this context, the only other indications of this are provided through a brief introduction to Melissa’s stereotypically white British sounding father Cornelius, yet this link to whiteness is never confirmed. At ease with blackness, Melissa is equally at home within her own sense of whiteness, comfortable within traditional sites of middle-class whiteness like Tolstoy and baby yoga. Like the Hunter family in *26a*, Evans continues to provide her audience with a mixed-race character for whom racial identity is uncomplicated, central yet at the same time on the periphery.

Although Melissa’s racial heritage is stated, albeit briefly, Damien’s is only ever alluded to. He is described as ‘a little stocky, going towards chubby, large hands, close dark curls and light-brown skin’ and although the reader is introduced to his Trinidadian black radical father Laurence, his presumably white mother is absent in the text (p.44). Damien’s mother is only present in so far as she becomes a contrast to Joyce, Laurence’s Trinidadian girlfriend, who states that he is only capable ‘of being with white women because white women did not need to be respected in the way that black women did’ (p.42). It is only through the references to his light skin and his father’s previous relations with white women that the reader gets a sense that Damien is mixed race. Again, Damien expresses little angst in regard to his racial identity; his childhood trauma is located in the absence of his mother, rather than the fact that his mother was white.

In ‘Aspiration and Attitudes’, Stuart Hall makes the distinction between the model of 1970s first generation black Briton thinking embodied by Laurence, where blackness was a site of confrontation, and the 1990s second/third generation for whom blackness remains a contested site, yet also one of confidence. Whilst Damien is characterised by a sense of

insularity and shyness, unable to fully embody the sense of a confident black British identity, the 'swagger' that Michael exhibits, his lack of conflict in his racial identity is contrasted sharply with that of Laurence (p.126). Laurence represents an older generation of black activists and intellectuals who fought for black rights in Britain. Briefly popular in the 1970s, Laurence finds himself unable to adjust to changing times and the dwindling interest in black radicalism, becoming increasingly trapped within his own outrage: 'He carried on working and thinking until this outrage became the only world he had left, and he shrunk with it, became thin and alone' (p.40). Although Damien grew up 'worried by this work still to be done' and in the shadow of his activist father, Fanon and Baldwin, he is conflicted by his desire to 'come home from school and watch *Neighbours* and not think about how and why there were no black people in *Neighbours*' (p.41). Damien struggles throughout the novel with his grief and dissatisfaction, yet he is free of the racial turmoil that defined, and eventually consumed, his father's existence. In the Britain of *Ordinary People,* the centrality of race to individual identity and daily life recedes as the generations progress and the children of diasporic parents are increasingly at home within Britain.

Central to Paul Gilroy's notion of conviviality, and a prerequisite for its success, is the idea of moving away 'from "race" altogether and toward a confrontation with the enduring power of racisms', a progression and distinction that *Ordinary People* offers.[63] Evans' novel speaks to the real issues of racism and fear that remain an entrenched part of the black experience in Britain, particularly through Michael's perspective, yet refuses to concede to the idea of races as separate and distinct. Michael's infidelity with his colleague Rachel, forms his first intimate experience with whiteness.

[63] Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press: 2005), p.9.

> It was minimal, physically, the difference between them, his brown against her cream. The real difference was in her life, in her history. She could never know him completely because she had not lived as he had lived […] He found himself explaining things to her and not liking that he had to explain, whereas with Melissa, or with Gillian, all the others before, they already knew those things […] because they were of the same texture, or a variation of that texture.[64]

Here, whilst the colour binary is minimal, it is the experience of being racialised within British society and the consequences of that racialisation – the 'fear', 'fury' and 'distrust' Michael has learnt – that is a barrier to a deeper connection. When confronted with whiteness, Michael longs for Melissa's 'texture'; the fact that Melissa's mixedness is a 'variation' of blackness has little distinction, as being any variant of black in Britain is a vastly different experience to that of being white.

This sense of racial solidarity between Michael and Melissa is challenged later in the novel, however, as Michael resists the idea of moving out of London, insisting on a 'need to be around brown people' when Melissa suggests they leave London for the Home Counties: 'When Melissa tried to see the world through Michael's eyes she could not see all of it. It was half closed' (p.233). This implies that a full understanding of what it means to be black in Britain is denied to Melissa as a result of her mixed race, yet it is through the mixed-race figure that Evans presents a sense of racial identity that is free of the turmoil and preoccupation that consumed Laurence and limits Michael. Without negating the validity of their experience, the mixed-race figure is a hopeful one in this context; the 'half' of the world that is closed to Melissa is not the part that doesn't understand the lived experience of race in Britain, but the part of that experience that impacts upon her life choices. Whilst this is

[64] Evans, *Ordinary People*, p.191.

mediated by her gender and her lighter skin, this sense of a lessened burden is also exhibited through Damien, who is troubled by an inherited anxiety about race, but is not inhibited by it. Unlike Laurence and Michael, who remain rooted in race thinking, Melissa views this attachment to race as a key component of their continued imprisonment:

> Those words, blackness, black people, whiteness, they were crude, contagious. The children would be infected by them, dragged also into this prison, this malady, this towering preoccupation, robbed also of a love for canyons, for particular lights (p.233).

It is significant that the mixed-race figure is the vehicle through which Evans exemplifies the ways in which a continued reliance upon a language of racial binaries is contagious and continues to constrain those infected by it. Rather than the mixed-race figure heralding a post-racial dawn – a popular interpretation of the mixed-race figure in post-millennium novels - Melissa represents nuance, understanding and a new way of thinking and talking about race.

When referring to race, Evans rejects terms such as black in favour of racialised allusions or more neutral terms such as 'brown' and 'beige', refusing to construct her narrative through the entrenched language of racial binaries and become imprisoned by it. This approach is not just restricted to non-white characters; whiteness, rather than being the unnamed default, is subject to this same sense of universal colourisation. In a similar vein to Michael, Stephanie's racial identity is communicated via allusion: she is described as 'not specifically his type', 'more Alison Moyet' than 'Chilli from TLC or Toni Braxton' (p.33), as 'wrong', a 'peachy daddy's princess' (p.37). Stephanie's whiteness is suggested through association with stereotypically white middle-class pursuits, such as horse riding, and in

contrast to black cultural figures. Later on, Evans details that Stephanie has 'red brown hair' and 'clear pale skin' (p.44). Again, there is a reluctance to discuss Stephanie with reference to whiteness: her skin is described as 'peachy' and 'pale' rather than white. Richard Dyer argues that 'as long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people.'[65] Importantly, Stephanie's racial identity is stated alongside that of the black characters in the novel, presenting whiteness as a racial identity in the same vein as blackness, removing its privilege as an unspoken, deracialised norm. It is equally important that whiteness is not presented as the epitome of beauty; it is clear that an attraction to Stephanie is a surprise for Damien and her appearance is contrasted with that of black women, rewriting a context in which blackness is the beauty ideal.

Even though the majority of the characters within the novel are mixed race – Melissa, Damien, their collective children, Melissa's niece and best friend Hazel – there is no explicit sense, or naming of, mixed-race identity present within the novel, precisely because it has been rendered ordinary and, as such, does not require a dedicated commentary. Evans succeeds in providing a narrative of mixed race, of race more generally, that is radical because it is 'everyday' and ordinary.[66] Melissa is described throughout in terms of her 'brownness' and Damien's racial heritage is suggested but never confirmed: as such, mixed race becomes something that is alluded to, rather than actively commented upon.[67] Similarly, blackness is configured as a sphere of differing shades of brownness, and whiteness as 'cream' or 'paleness', colours that are much more closely related on the colour spectrum than the extremes of black and white. Evans' extraordinary attention to the language with which

[65] Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.10.
[66] Caballero and Aspinall, p.7.
[67] Evans, *Ordinary People*, p.172.

she communicates race within the novel continues to foster this sense of connection and crossover, presenting race as a spectrum rather than a binary.

Ordinary People develops on the presentation of racial identity in *26a*, determinedly refusing to capitulate to the language and framework of race within which her novels have been read. Evans' commitment to reframing race has succeeded, as reflected in both the critical and academic response to her work in the last few years, suggesting a new openness and flexibility in relation to race and what constitutes 'black' British literature. Her continued refusal to present race as a site of anxiety, and blackness as 'other', has resulted in a mediated sense of Britishness that is both indelibly black and undeniably British, successfully 'recasting black British experience within an English framework.'[68] Critics of *Ordinary People* are more open to considering blackness and Britishness as interconnected, in opposition to the ways in which they were insistently separated in the response to *26a,* and Evans' work is presented as representative of a global, multicultural sense of blackness, rather than a specifically African-centred blackness. In *Ordinary People,* race becomes something that is 'taken-for-granted' in the sense of Procter's 'postcolonial everyday', working towards deconstructing continuously reinforced racial boundaries. The novel negates discourses of race that continue to present blackness as extraordinary, and separate from, white Britishness. The exploration of Michael's experience of Britain as a black male, and the references to the Stephen Lawrence murder, are reflective of Gilroy's sense of a convivial culture, where the focus shifts from conceptualising racial difference towards confronting the impact of centuries of racial distinction: a distinction that was compounded by the discourse of multiculturalism that suggested Britain was a 'community of communities' existing in racial and cultural isolation.[69] *Ordinary People* functions as a 'future-thinking narrative arc'

[68] Reive Holland, p.556.
[69] The Parekh Report, p.3.

that urges the reader to move away from racial thinking, and the language of racial difference, and 'to invest in these futures as almost possibles.'[70]

[70] Upstone, *Rethinking Race*, p.13.

5. MIXED RACE IN 2018: ZADIE SMITH

In the essay 'The I Who Is Not Me', featured in Zadie Smith's 2018 essay collection *Feel Free*, she muses on her own journey of mixed-race identity in relation to the mixed-race characters that feature in almost all of her novels. She writes:

> Perhaps the most autobiographical part of my writing is the barely conscious awareness, deep down, that a part of me is always writing backwards to the confused brown girl I once was, providing the books I wished back then that I could read.[1]

Smith writes that the only model of mixed-race identity available to her growing up was 'that old, worn-out, paper thin character the tragic mulatto', the trope of the mixed-race figure commonly found in American literature and film, whose racial identity is a source of psychological distress that typically results in their demise. Smith states that this one-dimensional, tragic characterisation of mixed-race individuals, echoes of which can be identified in Smith's earlier work, are the 'consequence of a failure of imagination, both my own and others' (p.341). This chapter explores the ways in which Smith's recent presentations of mixedness attempt to conceive of a more nuanced, fleshed out version of mixed-race identity that offers an alternative to the 'paper thin' characterisation of the tragic mulatto, a stereotype mired in feelings of self-loathing, confusion and social isolation.[2] This chapter argues further that her work not only attempts to construct more progressive iterations of mixed-race identity, but also demonstrates a similar trajectory, from a

[1] Zadie Smith, *Feel Free: Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2018), p.342.
[2] The 'Tragic Mulatto' figure is best exemplified in American texts such as Nella Larson's *Passing* and Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy.*

stereotypical representation of mixed-race identity in 2000's *White Teeth*, to a more nuanced, thoughtful version in 2016's *Swing Time* and 2018's *Feel Free*.

In this chapter, I propose that Smith's writing, and the evolution of ideas of mixed race across her novels and non-fiction, suggests that there are aspects of commonality within the experience of being mixed race within Britain. This experience is identified by an awareness of being racialised and different from one's parents from early childhood, what Smith refers to as 'a third, impossible option in an otherwise binary culture'.[3] This stage of mixed-race identity development culminates in a period of identity experimentation in adolescence, as an attempt to reconcile the mixed-race subject's racialised positioning and construct a meaningful subject position within this over-determined racial framework. I argue that, rather than the mixed-race experience being defined by identity crisis, as has often been the stereotypical depiction, a period of racial self-discovery and exploration is an aspect common to the experience of growing up mixed race within Britain. This experience is traumatic only in the sense that it occurs in a predominantly white society where racism continues to proliferate. The mixed-race subject position is not defined by a 'psychological maladjustment', but rather a 'response to an environment that has internalized racist beliefs'.[4] Smith's work shows us that what has historically been represented as a mixed-race identity crisis, can be motivated as much by curiosity and the experimentation of youth as by a sense of racial trauma.

[3] Smith, *Feel Free: Essays*, p.340.
[4] Mahtani, p.37.

WHITE TEETH (2000) AND *CHANGING MY MIND* (2009)

At the start of the millennium, when *White Teeth* was published, one of the most prevailing ideas about the expanding mixed-race demographic was that it was a generation that would grow up engulfed by 'a feeling of isolation, of not quite belonging anywhere, and, at its extreme, of feelings of despair'.[5] Interracial relationships between white working-class women and Afro-Caribbean men were the focus of discussions of mixed race, dominated by the idea that children born of two 'separate' cultures would suffer from a lack of belonging in Britain and confusion as to their racial identity. It was assumed that interracial relationships, with Afro-Caribbean men in particular, would result in a generation of resolutely working-class, mixed-race children with absent fathers.[6] Almost all of the interracial relationships in Smith's fiction refute this stereotypical presentation at its most foundational level. In *White Teeth*, *On Beauty* and *Swing Time*, whilst all the interracial relationships occur between white and Afro-Caribbean couples, the father is almost always white British, the mother Afro-Caribbean, or African-American in the case of Kiki Belsey in *On Beauty*. The families range from the working-class roots of the Joneses in *White Teeth*, to the upwardly mobile mother of the protagonist in *Swing Time* and the established elites of the Belseys in *On Beauty*. It is only the representation of Tracey's family dynamics in *Swing Time* that reflect this stereotype, as her mother is white and working-class and her father Afro-Caribbean and

[5] Tizard and Phoenix, p.44.

[6] This discourse has been particularly resilient in relation to mixed-race people of Afro-Caribbean descent. In 2018, a sociology textbook that was still in use in the classroom was revoked as it claimed Caribbean fathers were 'largely absent' from their families, demonstrates the tenacity of this stereotype.
Eleanor Busby, 'GCSE textbook claiming Caribbean men are "largely absent" from families is withdrawn after outrage', *The Independent*, 8 October 2018 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/gcse-sociology-textbook-caribbean-men-fathers-racism-families-hodder-education-aqa-social-media-a8573956.html> [accessed 2 January 2019].

absent. With the exception of Tracey, *Swing Time* in particular provides the reader with numerous examples of mixed-race families across the social class spectrum. The narrator's mother is a self-made, well-educated black woman, Rakim's family read as middle class and Tracey's family are working class. Smith's representations of the mixed-race family typically present a nuclear family where both the mother and father remain present. This presentation of the interracial family as a traditional nuclear family unit, one which can be found within a variety of social classes, refutes the stereotype of the mixed-race family as one that sits outside of social norms.

From the outset of her career Smith was writing against stereotypes of mixed race and interracial relationships, and yet her first novel *White Teeth* also displays some of the tropes associated with outdated representations of mixed race. One of the central characters within the novel is Irie Jones, the daughter of black Jamaican mother Clara Bowden and older, white British father Archie Jones. Irie's section of the novel is defined by an identity crisis rooted in her mixed race and her section begins with an advertisement, of which 'she knew she was the target audience', to lose weight which catalyses an internal crisis over her body:

> Now, Irie Jones, aged fifteen, was big. The European proportions of Clara's figure had skipped a generation, and she was landed instead with Hortense's substantial Jamaican frame, loaded with pineapples, mangos and guavas.[7]

Irie's insecurity is centred in her physiology because it reflects her Jamaican heritage, speaking to exotic, tropical fruit rather than the traditional English pear. She reads the advert as speaking directly to her, dreams about having the weight-loss advert 'written in chalk over her brown bulges', functioning as an instruction to change herself in order to fit in within

[7] Smith, *White Teeth*, p.265.

Britain (p.266). In an effort to conform to European beauty standards and attract Millat Iqbal – who, despite his own Bangladeshi heritage, was considered a 'dark prince' by both his peers and middle-aged white British women like Joyce Chalfen – she visits a black salon to chemically straighten her hair (p.269).

Visiting P.K.'s Afro Hair: Design and Management serves only to highlight Irie's feelings of cultural isolation. Jackie, the hairdresser, after referring to her as 'half-caste' and assuming that her mother was white, proceeds to critique her lack of knowledge about black hair care. She chastises Irie for washing her hair before her appointment, and mocks her for being on time, rather than understanding the hairdresser would be working to 'Jamaican time' which 'naturally […] meant come late' (p.273). Rather than improve her self-confidence, the visit to the salon ruins her hair and deepens her sense of alienation. Whereas previously, Irie felt out of place within white Britain, her lack of awareness of black hair culture also makes her feel out of place within predominantly black environments. Forced to wear extensions to mask her newly shorn hair, Irie is initially 'bewitched by her own reflection' (p.283), until Millat's cousin Neena laughs at her appearance and calls her a 'freak' (p.284). This response catalyses Irie's identity crisis and, in this sense, Irie's narrative epitomises what Ralina Joseph refers to as a '"new millennium mulatta"', a mixed-race figure 'who is always divided, alone and uncomfortable'.[8] Irie's alienation from both whiteness and black culture, combined with the self-hatred attached to her racialised physiology, aligns her narrative with that of the tragic mulatto.

Unable to reconcile her physiology within European beauty standards, Irie attempts to find an echo of herself within British history and culture though the Dark Lady of Shakespeare's sonnets. She attempts to use the glimmer of reflection she finds amongst the

[8] Joseph, p.4.

'black wires grow[ing] on [the Dark Lady's] head'[9] to locate herself within England, only to be told by the teacher that 'there weren't any…well, Afro-Carri-bee-yans in England at that time, dear. That's a more modern phenomenon, as I'm sure you know' (p.271). Attempting to find validation through Shakespeare, a bastion of British identity, is part of Irie's struggle towards constructing a stable British identity that incorporates her raciality: an attempt which is mocked and denied by both the students and the teacher within the classroom. This is a further rejection of her racialised physiology and a denial of space within contemporary British society. She abandons her attempt in the face of 'giggling' and upon the receipt of a note entitled 'ODE TO LETITIA AND ALL MY KINKY-HAIRED BIG-ASS BITCHEZ' (p.272).

Irie's section of narrative is titled *The Miseducation of Irie Jones* which incorporates many of the issues Smith is addressing. The interlude in class alludes to the way in which the British history taught in schools erases non-white people from the narrative, contributing to the enduring myth that Britain's 'native' population is exclusively white. This has particular ramifications for Britain's mixed population, which is so often referred to and ideologically constructed as a 'new' demographic, as indicated by the laughter that greeted Irie's suggestion that Shakespeare might take a black woman as a subject. The title also refers to the way in which Irie is taught to dislike her physiology as a result of narrow, Eurocentric beauty standards. Smith uses Irie's narrative to comment on the ways in which social ideas and values contributed directly to the confusion and insecurity so often associated with ideas about mixed-race identity. Irie's narrative epitomises many of the stereotypes attached to mixed race during the late 1990s, a belief that 'she was all wrong', whilst at the same time acknowledging that those anxieties are a response to a society where white supremacy is insidious and persistent (p.268).

[9] Smith, *White Teeth*, p.269.

This early twenty-first-century narrative of mixed race, defined by insecurity, trauma and a lack of belonging, is still prevalent in the literature and media published around mixed race in Britain today. Whilst very few films and television shows are produced with mixed race at the centre, the past five years have seen a resurgence of interracial relationships and mixed-race characters presented on screen. In 2013, British film *Belle* was released, a biography of the eighteenth-century mixed-race aristocrat Dido Elizabeth Belle. 2016 saw the release of the American film *Loving*, a biography of interracial couple Mildred and Richard Loving, whose marriage altered the constitution of the United States in the 1960s. *A United Kingdom*, a British film biography of the interracial romance between an African heir and a white British woman in the 1940s, was also released in 2016, directed by Amma Asante who also directed *Belle*. All three films focus on mixed-race protagonists and families, and in all instances the interracial relationships featured face opposition and are the cause of social unease. *Belle*'s narrative in particular focuses on a mixed-race protagonist whose narrative aligns with that of the tragic mulatto. She is rescued from her racially determined fate by her white saviour aristocrat father and raised as a part of his family. Whilst she is allowed some of the privileges afforded to those of her social rank, her blackness prohibits her from enjoying them in full; she is of too high a class to dine with the servants, yet it is considered inappropriate for her to dine with guests. She struggles with understanding how to care for her own hair and there is a scene that sees her pull at her face and beat at her chest as if to punish herself for her own blackness. Though Belle's position becomes more secure and self-assured towards the end of the narrative, the film presents a woman out of place from both the black (lower) and white (upper) classes within society, taught to despise her own physiology. Whilst *A United Kingdom* and *Loving* focus on interracial relationships, rather than mixed-race protagonists, what all three films share is that they are rooted in specific historical periods, ones in which interracial relationships faced vehement opposition. None of

these contemporary films actually deal with the contemporary moment or depict what the experience of being in an interracial relationship, or mixed race, might look like now. Instead, they highlight periods in which those experiences were traumatic or the locus of societal unrest and opposition, which leads to questions about why these types of narratives are the ones that continue to receive funding and significant platforms. What is at work here in the perpetuation of these narratives within the contemporary moment? Whilst they do expose aspects of underrepresented racial history and stories to a mainstream audience, there are no alternative narratives of interracial relations made available outside of the ones defined by social division or solely featuring black and white protagonists.

Similarly, in relation to mainstream literary publications in the UK, few literary titles centre a mixed-race narrative. When *White Teeth* was published in 2000, it was followed by a spate of fiction written by mixed-race authors or that featured mixed-race protagonists – Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist* (2002), Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) or Diana Evans *26a* (2005). Outside of Smith's work, very few books that feature mixed-race protagonists have been published, or have received the same marketing attention and investment, in recent years following the early twenty-first century trend for mixed-race fiction. In 2018, Vintage published Afua Hirsch's non-fiction text *Brit(ish)*. Hirsch centres her work in her experience of growing up as a mixed-race woman in one of London's wealthiest suburbs, Wimbledon, and the book merges her autobiographical journey from London to Africa, and back again, with a revisionist exploration of British history that focuses on race. She discusses her feelings of being a mixed-race 'outsider' within the predominantly white environments of her private school and Oxford University, experiences which lead to her fixating upon a return, a 'homegoing' to Africa to counteract the lack of belonging in Britain she felt in Britain.

Hirsch's narrative of mixed race echoes that of the 'tragic mulatto', as she describes an adolescence of feeling out of place and visibly other. Hirsch writes:

> I am the eternal outsider. In Wimbledon, I am the black girl. The more I asserted my black identity, the more of a threat I became to the prevailing order […] For years I internalised this as a status that carried with it multiple rejections, because everywhere I went, I was other.[10]

Like the protagonists of Smith's novels, Hirsch also describes a period of development in regard to her racial identity as an adolescent, a period of exploring, and emphasising, her blackness. After feeling further marginalised at Oxford, and upon entering the media industry, Hirsch moved to Africa, believing that a return 'back home' would cure her chronic lack of belonging. Once in Africa, however, rather than experiencing an immediate sense of belonging she is labelled an 'obruni', a white tourist, and realises that whilst she is too black for Britain, she is too white for Africa (p.20). Hirsch's book examines the trope of authenticity that is often assigned to racial identity, and particularly tenuous in regard to mixed-race identity. She measures her own racial identity against that of her British-Ghanaian husband, whose African cultural roots she believes to be more deeply embedded than her own. Her mixedness – and her Britishness - makes her question the legitimacy of her blackness and African cultural identity whilst in Africa, and her husband's more 'authentic' version of blackness raises the same questions in Britain.

Hirsch's narrative, whilst provocative and a much-needed mainstream examination of contemporary issues of race in Britain, is reflective of older narratives of mixed race defined by confusion, feelings of inauthenticity and social isolation. In his book, *Race and the Cultural Industries*, Anamik Saha argues that the 'discourse of 'diversity' in the media

[10] Hirsch, p.19.

effectively 'makes race' […] it constructs industry and public understandings of race'.[11] If, as Saha argues, the media industry directly contributes to public understanding and attitudes towards race on a national level, and they also control the narratives/authors that are not only published, but marketed to a wide audience, then they are directly responsible for the ideas about race that continue to circulate. This narrative of mixed race – written by an author still benefitting from class privilege and the connection with Oxford University - was heavily marketed, chosen as one London's Big Read books in 2018, generating a lot of media attention. Eighteen years after the publication of *White Teeth* and discourses of mixed race centred around a crisis of identity and unbelonging remains the dominant narrative offered.

Similarly, Hirsch's own profile suggests little progress has been made to address the lack of diversity within the publishing industry, despite multiple reports admonishing the continued whiteness of both industry staff and output.[12] Hirsch is from an upper-middle-class background, grew up in wealthy Wimbledon, attended private school and Oxford University, illustrating that class privilege remains a prerequisite within the publishing industry, as the profiles of Smith, and her successors, demonstrated at the start of the millennium. Continuing to highlight narratives of mixed race that reflect the experiences of a small minority of minorities, serves only to re-entrench stagnant ideas about race within the public consciousness, in direct opposition to the aim of Hirsch's book, which is to galvanise progress in this area. This analysis is not intended to undermine or devalue Hirsch's lived experience of growing up mixed race in the UK, but to emphasise that the experience of an upper-middle-class, privately-educated young woman, who grew up in a predominantly white wealthy area, is unlikely to be representative of the majority of people racialised as mixed

[11] Saha, p.6.
[12] Kean, *Writing the Future: Black and Asian Authors and Publishers in the Market Place* (London: Spread the Word, 2015).
Claire Squires, *Publishing's Diversity Deficit* (Leicester: CAMEo Cuts, 2017).

race within the UK, and yet it remains the most predominantly available/saleable narrative. Whilst it is possible to locate *White Teeth* as a product of its cultural climate, in a period of British history dominated by a policy of multiculturalism more interested in celebrating tokenistic diversity than working towards the creation of a functioning multicultural state, it is more difficult to contextualise Hirsch's narrative in the contemporary cultural climate, in which increasing attention and scrutiny – yet arguably no tangible action - is paid to the diversity of the cultural industries than ever before.

In *Changing My Mind*, Smith's first essay collection published in 2009, in the midst of a renewed narrative of the 'exceptional multiracial', Smith wrote an essay entitled 'Speaking in Tongues' about the newly elected US president Barack Obama.[13] The essay centred on the idea of the mixed-race individual as one uniquely positioned to speak to a variety of subject positions. For Smith, Obama epitomised this subject position and she labels both herself, and him, a member of 'Dream City';

> A place of many voices, where the unified singular self is an illusion. Naturally, Obama was born there. So was I. When your personal multiplicity is printed on your face, in an almost too obviously thematic manner, in your DNA, in your hair and in the neither-this-nor-that beige of your skin – well, anyone can see you come from Dream City. In Dream City, everything is doubled, everything is various. You have no choice but to cross borders and speak in tongues.[14]

In Smith's depiction of 'Dream City', mixed-race people are uniquely placed to speak across the borders of race. In this conception and era of mixed-race identity, the visible multiplicity

[13] Joseph, p.6.
[14] Zadie Smith, *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2009), p.138.

that confounds Irie is an asset, one powerful enough to elect a mixed-race black president after centuries of that elected office representing white supremacy. Smith refers to her childhood as one which involved the 'synthesis of disparate things', the idea of mixedness as not only being able to accommodate hybrid identities, but to signify that identities are multiple, in opposition to the idea of identity as fixed and singular (p.133). The sense of mixed-race identity that Smith presents in *Changing My Mind* echoes the need for a fluid approach to mixed race, where the boundaries are flexible rather than fixed.

There are also echoes within *Changing My Mind* of Smith's own racial identity changing. During the publication period of *White Teeth*, the media coverage of the novel was dominated by references to, and questions about, her racial identity and background. In response to questions about her racial identity, or comparisons to authors such as Salman Rushdie, journalists described Smith as 'prickly', 'possess[ing] a bit of bite'[15] and 'spiky in manner', displaying a distinct reluctance to discuss her racial background, or comment on race in any way.[16] *Changing My Mind* signalled a turning point in this approach and, in an essay on Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Smith examines her own reluctance to identify with blackness, and to engage with Hurston from the position of a black, female writer, out of fear of her 'extra literary feelings for her'.[17] Smith narrates her journey from a refusal to engage with blackness, to an acknowledgement of a feeling of recognition:

> When I began this piece it felt important to distance myself from that idea [of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* being a black book]. By doing so, I misrepresent a vital

[15] George, 'Author Purposeful With Prose, Fidgety With Fame'.
[16] Sarah Lyall, 'A Good Start', *The New York Times*, 30 April 2000 <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/00/04/30/reviews/000430.30lyallt.html> [accessed 20 March 2019].
[17] Smith, *Changing My Mind*, p.7.

> aspect of my response to this book, one that is entirely personal, as any response to a novel shall be. Fact is, I *am* a black woman, and a slither of this book goes straight into my soul, I suspect, for that reason (p.12).

This essay marks a seminal turning point in Smith's public racial identity, a shift from an uncomfortable refusal to discuss race in a public forum, to naming herself a black woman. Critical mixed-race scholar Sika Dagbovie-Mullins argues that this particular aspect of the mixed-race journey, experimenting with elements of black culture and identity, is crucial to the development of what she terms a 'black sentient mixed-race identity', which she argues:

> intimates a mixed-race subjectivity that includes a particular awareness of the world, a perception rooted in blackness. It suggests a connection to a black consciousness that does not over-determine one's racial identification but still plays a large role in it.[18]

I argue later that this sense of recognition is a crucial aspect of the mixed-race experience and, in this piece, Smith suggests that recognising herself within Hurston's novel was an important aspect in the development of her own racial identity, one that allowed her to name herself a black woman and still exist within a framework of mixed race; a 'black sentient mixed-race identity'.

SWING TIME (2016) AND *FEEL FREE* (2018)

Published in 2016, sixteen years after *White Teeth*, *Swing Time* presents a more nuanced sense of mixed-race identity. British ideas about mixed race have been slow to change, and

[18] Dagbovie-Mullins, *Crossing B(l)ack,* p.2.

often narratives of mixed race remain rooted in either the stereotype of the 'tragic mulatto' or the 'exceptional multiracial' as identified above.[19] Whilst mainstream narratives, including Smith's own earlier works, do not seem to have progressed from the tropes that defined ideas about mixed race in the noughties, *Swing Time's* nuanced iteration of mixed-race identity attempts to move beyond familiar stereotypes to articulate a more multifaceted possibility. *Swing Time* follows the fate of two mixed-race girls as they meet in a dance class in Willesden in 1982, where they are the only two non-white girls in attendance. The unnamed narrator has a black mother and a white working-class father, whilst her counterpart Tracey has a white working-class mother and an absent Afro-Caribbean father. The novel follows them as they grow up, grow apart and attempt to find their place in the world. The narrative time frame and location of *Swing Time* heavily overlaps with that of *White Teeth*. Both novels feature mixed-race girls growing up in 1980s north-west London, and reading the texts as implicitly connected is encouraged through intertextual reference: the two girls in *Swing Time* are in the same class as a mixed-race girl named Irie. Whilst Irie and the unnamed narrator of *Swing Time* are contemporaries, though written sixteen years apart, the ways in which the two novels present mixed-race identity show Smith's developing ideas within the intervening years.

When the two girls meet in the local dance hall, the narrator states how they 'noticed' each other immediately, and she undertakes a silent assessment of both their features: their 'shade of brown was exactly the same', their 'freckles gathered in the same area' and her nose 'was as problematic as mine'.[20]

[19] Joseph, p.6.
[20] Zadie Smith, *Swing Time* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2016), p.9.

> On noses you could call it a draw. On hair she won comprehensively. She had spiral curls, they reached to her backside and were gathered in two long plaits […] She pulled my great frizz back in a single cloud, tied with a black band (p.9).

Whilst the narrator describes this assessment as noting the 'similarities and differences, as girls will', in actuality it is an appraisal of whose features were most 'problematic', understood as blackness in this context (p.9). Like Irie, at a young age the girls have already been made aware that noses, hair and skin colour that deviate from white norms and beauty standards pose a problem within British society. This internalisation of insecurity and anxiety in relation to their racialised features continues to interfere with their creation of a positive mixed-race identity. It becomes an unspoken competition amongst the girls as to which one was the closest to whiteness.

As the narrative progresses, however, the narrator's feelings about those same racialised features change. At a later point in the novel, when the narrator is an adult, she straightens her hair for a night out, presumably indoctrinated to the idea of straight hair as a marker of attractiveness. At the start of the night it starts to rain and her hair begins to revert back to curls. Unlike Irie, whose curls represented ugliness and difference to her, the narrator describes her hair as 'lamb's wool', enjoying 'the damp spring of it, thick and alive' (p.138). Irie attempts to assimilate into Eurocentric beauty standards by losing weight and straightening her hair, taming the aspects of her physiology demarcated by her blackness. In contrast to Irie, and Tracey who would regularly measure her whiteness against the narrator's, the narrator of *Swing Time* measures beauty by that of her 'Nefertiti'-esque (p.9) mother: she 'lay out on the balcony on any hot day, aiming at exactly the quality [Tracey] seemed to dread: more colour, more darkness, for all my freckles to join and merge and leave me the same deep dark brown of my mother' (p.179). For the narrator of *Swing Time* there is

no emotional trauma attached to black physicality, only an inherent belief that black is beautiful. Shirley Tate argues that the 'black is beautiful' and Afro hair movement of the 1960s and 1970s acted as a performance of 'anti-racist aesthetics', a movement that has found renewed energy in the twenty-first century natural hair movement, particularly for mixed-race women, for whom ''the positive image' is that of beautiful women with natural tight curls'.[21] It is certainly true that recent years have seen a politicised movement towards the reclamation of natural hair amongst black women, both in the UK and the United States. The difference in perception between Irie and the narrator of *Swing Time* recognises this shift in racial politics and presents a mixed-race character embracing her racialised physiology as an act of empowerment, reflecting a shift – if only amongst black and mixed-race women – in racialised beauty standards.

Like Irie, the narrator also experiences periods of feeling out of place within her own family, a lack of connection and belonging that at first is attributed to her racial difference from her parents. Upon learning of her father's white children from a previous marriage she found that 'she could not deny his [son's] essential rightness': 'yes, he is right and I am wrong, isn't it interesting?'.[22] Whilst her automatic assumption is that she is the one out of place, Smith's phrasing – 'isn't it interesting' - downplays the impact of this so that it seems like a musing on social expectations, rather than a traumatic realisation. As the narrative progresses, it becomes apparent that this sense of alienation is rooted in a lack of emotional connection and difference of personality between the narrator and her family, rather than a consequence of her racial difference and in-betweenness. In this conceptualisation of mixed-race identity, whilst race is a factor that affects an individual's sense of self and belonging, it is not the defining factor, nor the sole cause of a sense of social and familial isolation.

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[21] Shirley Tate, 'Black beauty: Shade, hair and anti-racist aesthetics', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30:2 (2007), 300 - 319 (pp.301, 303).
[22] Smith, *Swing Time*, p.46.

This sense of Smith questioning ideas and assumptions about mixed-race identity is apparent in the discussion between the narrator and Tracey about the fact of her father's whiteness. Tracey 'argu[ed], with a certain authority, that we had things 'the wrong way round':

> With everyone else it's the dad,' she said, and because I knew this to be more or less accurate I could think of nothing more to say. 'When your dad's white it means' – she continued, but at that moment Lily Bingham came and stood next to us and I never did learn what it meant when your dad was white (p.16).

Smith is questioning commonly held assumptions about mixed race and drawing attention to the stereotypical ideas of mixed race that linger in the British imaginary, such as the expectation of absent black fatherhood as seen in Tracey's own family setup. The narrator never learns what it means to have a white father as there is no alternative narrative available to this. Whilst *Swing Time* illustrates similar concerns to that of *White Teeth* – insecurity regarding racialised physicality, feelings of being out of place and not belonging, a persistent preoccupation with race – the sense of crisis that Irie feels around her mixed-race identity is absent in the unnamed narrator of *Swing Time*. Trauma and anxiety are replaced instead by a contemplative probing of established ideas about mixed race. This scene also highlights an additional layer of this dynamic, an inability to articulate the experience of being mixed race to white people, and the general sense that it is a topic that is not be discussed in white social circles. It is an unspoken agreement between Tracey and the narrator that this is an inappropriate subject to discuss in the company of white Lily Bingham. This scene symbolises the ways in which conversations about race are obstructed by the oppression of a predominantly white society that has been taught it is impolite to talk about race. Both girls

inherently understand that this is not a subject white society is interested in learning about or listening to. Perhaps mixed-race people remain rooted in a cycle of confusion concerning their racial identity as there is no space in which to discuss it with other mixed-race people: the two girls understand from early on that, though they may naturally gravitate towards each other, they should instead elicit the friendship of their white peers.

The most recent and extensive study of mixed-race identity development in Britain, *Mixed Race Identities*, was conducted by social scientists Peter Aspinall and Miri Song in 2013. Their study utlilised a mix of quantitative and qualitative data to provide a substantive sense of mixed-race identity that was grounded in lived experience. Aspinall and Song suggest that even though being mixed race is often central to a sense of self, the heterogeneous nature of it ensures that 'being mixed, per se, would not be a sufficient basis for feeling a sense of kinship' with other mixed people.[23] Their study emphasises the importance of detail in relation to mixedness, of specificity and multiplicity, and a desire to identify in non-standard ways which renders the notion of a standardised, collective identity redundant. Whilst *Swing Time*'s various incarnations of mixed-race identity show this heterogeneity in family dynamics, physiology and racial identification, I would argue, however, that it does suggest a sense of mixed-race kinship that is absent in the narrative of *White Teeth* and Irie's social isolation. Every time the narrator and Tracey meet in the dance hall, both girls are alert to the other's presence:

> At this early stage Tracey and I were not friends or enemies or even acquaintances: we barely spoke. Yet there was always this mutual awareness, an invisible band

[23] Aspinall and Song, p.176.

> strung between us, connecting us and preventing us from straying too deeply into relations with others.[24]

Even though the girls are not friends yet, and do not yet share a kinship in that sense, they do share an affinity with each other directly related to the fact that they are the only two mixed-race girls in the room. It is the depth of this connection that keeps them from developing close friendships with the other (white) girls, though it is relationships with white girls that they both initially cultivate: 'it was almost unconscious, two iron filings drawn to a magnet' (p.16).

Smith writes about this sense of recognition, of a subconscious connection, in a preface to Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* included in her essay collection *Feel Free*.

> Karim was different, I knew him […] he was one of the 'new breed', like me, like so many kids in our school, although the only other mentions of us I'd ever come across before were all of the 'tragic mulatto' variety. But the kids I knew were not tragic […] they felt special, even if the rest of the world thought they were marginal.[25]

Smith's connection with Karim, her sense of 'knowing' him, speaks to an underlying commonality of experience or kinship that is inherent to the 'similar set of racialized experiences' of being mixed race.[26] Kureishi has stated that Karim was influenced in large part by his own experience of growing up mixed race in Britain, so this sense of kinship evident in Smith's fiction, is one that is rooted in reality – between Smith and Kureishi. The

[24] Smith, *Swing Time*, p.16.
[25] Smith, *Feel Free: Essays*, p.237.
[26] Mahtani, p.6.

connection Smith felt to the book and its central character, had an influence on her own writing, but also her own sense of self: 'I owe a lot, both personally and professionally, to Kureishi's account of the strange relationship that can exist between first-generation immigrants and their children'.[27] This does not suggest that Smith and Kureishi shared the same experience of growing up mixed race in Britain, but it does suggest a unifying connection, a sense of shared kinship specific to the experience of being mixed race in Britain. Echoing *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *Swing Time* seems to suggest that a sense of liminality, a curiosity about race and the performativity of racial identity, as well as a sense of precarity surrounding the mixed-race subject position, is a common element of the mixed-race experience.

Throughout her teens, *Swing Time*'s narrator struggles with her identity as her friendship with Tracey deteriorates. Feeling out of place within many of the cliques at school, she has a brief gothic period in her teens which is followed by a black conscious period at university. It is here that she first begins to develop and experiment with a black identity, attending lectures about the 'Black Body' and finding freedom in dancing to Gang Starr and Nas, rather than the rigidity of the older white standards she was used to dancing to: 'when I danced now I didn't have to obey any ancient rules of position or style: I moved as I pleased, as the beats themselves compelled me to move'.[28] *Swing Time*'s narrator wholeheartedly embraces the costume and performativity of her newly acquired 'black' identity:

> In our little circle to be 'conscious' was the thing, and after years of forcing my hair straight with the hot-comb I now let it frizz and curl and took to wearing a small map of Africa around my neck, the larger countries made up in a patchwork leather of

[27] Smith, *Feel Free: Essays*, p.239.
[28] Smith, *Swing Time*, p.286.

> black and red, green and gold. I wrote long, emotional essays on the phenomenon of the 'Uncle Tom' (p.287).

Whilst the narrative tone in this section is knowing and self-deprecatory, the endeavours of the narrator during this period of time are earnest. She attempts to amalgamate a black identity constructed from the fragments of black – largely American – popular culture available to her, through the conscious, 'golden age of hip hop' that exploded in the nineties and the influx of new subjects such as gender studies and black studies (p.287). The narrator's racial identity at this point is performative and largely aesthetic, signified by an Afro and a necklace of Africa, yet it provides her with a sense of freedom and a positive space to identify with blackness.

This is reinforced when she meets her first boyfriend Rakim, whose own black identity, whilst ostensibly preoccupied with black intellectual concerns, is also comically performative. Rakim was 'a conscious young man […] he had renamed himself after the rapper', who had dreadlocks and exulted in his own blackness (p.287). He wore 'skinny dreadlocks' like 'Huey P. Newton himself', 'little round Lennon glasses' and owned a 'cool vintage Panthers poster' (p.288). Whilst Rakim projects an emphatically black subject position, it is revealed at the end of this section of the novel that Rakim is mixed race when the narrator is introduced to his white mother at their graduation ceremony. This revelation further emphasises the performativity of his black identity and the performativity of racial identity in general. Whilst the narrator is retrospectively mocking of this, of Rakim's lack of self-awareness, there is a sense of earnestness evident in their commitment to performing a black identity that suggests there is a psychological impulse behind this performance that runs deeper than the desire to impress or look cool.

In the essays 'Speaking in Tongues' and 'The I Who Is Not Me', Smith presents the mixed-race figure as an interstitial one able to exist within multiple spaces and speak in multiple tongues. In these essays, the mixed-race positon is a transformative and 'inherently creative' one, and both Rakim and the narrator take advantage of this hybrid position, constructing a version of black identity that provides them with a positive racial identity. Viewed in these terms, the narrator's and Rakim's adoption of facsimiles of American black culture is an aspect of the journey towards consolidating a subject position that incorporates blackness, without being 'over-determined' by it, echoing Dagbovie-Mullins' theorisation of a 'black sentient mixed-race identity'.[29] As the narrator references, so much of her early life centred around constructing a racial identity rooted in whiteness through her dance training, her obsession with old Hollywood musicals and her brief period of literally painting her face white as a teenage Goth. Her move to university, and discovery of black consciousness, Rakim and hip-hop, provide an alternative possibility, one that feels free and self-defined.

This feeling of freedom and self-definition, however, begins to mutate into something as oppressive as 'the aching insteps' and 'judgment of other people' that accompanied the pursuit of classical dancing.[30] Rakim's particular incarnation of black consciousness is specifically male-centred and repressive, and the narrator starts to feel as though she is 'under a cloud of constant correction' (p.289). Rakim constantly critiques and invalidates her newly formed black identity, tracing her faults to 'the struggle to triumph over the division within' (p.289) and 'the blood of [her] [white] father' (p.291).

> The division he claimed he could see inside of me I understood very well, nothing was easier for me to grasp than the idea that I was born half right and half wrong, yes,

[29] Dagbovie-Mullins, *Crossing B(l)ack*, p.2.
[30] Smith, *Swing Time*, p.286.

> as long as I did not think of my actual father and the love I bore him I could tap this feeling in myself very easily (p.289).

This notion of 'wrongness' attached to her mixed-race identity echoes Irie's feelings of 'being all wrong' and notions of mixed race that emphasise internal fractures and divisions. The ease with which the narrator accepts this proclamation of her wrongness, her division, suggests an underlying anxiety surrounding her racial identity in line with stereotypical depictions of the tragic mulatto. Yet, unlike Irie, for whom this feeling of wrongness catalysed an identity crisis, the narrator of *Swing Time* contextualises this feeling. Whilst it would be easy for her to succumb to this hegemony, her loving relationship with her father enables her to reject it. Unlike traditional mixed-race narratives, and Smith's early iterations of them, the narrator's family relationships are a source of security and empowerment, rather than a catalyst of doubt and instability. Rather than the fact of her white father making her mixed-race identity unstable, when external forces attempt to destabilise her sense of self, it is her relationship with him that helps her resist that push. Whilst external social forces attempt, usually successfully, to convince her that her position as a mixed-race individual is a precarious one, Smith is illustrating the ways in which strong family relationships can counteract, and resist, those outside voices.

The phrasing of this idea, of being 'half right and half wrong', is interesting in its ambiguity, as it does not state which half of her racial identity has been assigned the 'wrong' designation. In contrast with *White Teeth,* where Irie's wrongness is explicitly linked to her blackness, it could be inferred that the reference to the narrator of *Swing Time*'s white father suggests that it is that aspect of her identity that feels out of place, particularly during this period of time when the construction of a black identity has accrued such importance to the narrator. This ambiguity reflects a refusal to present a version of mixedness that continues to

prioritise and reinforce white supremacy in the assumption that whiteness is the default desire. Rakim's commitment to his own black identity, his shame over the revelation of his white mother, similarly works to speak against this narrative of whiteness as the default desire. It acts as a reversal of the passing narrative, in which light skinned mixed-race people attempted to pass as white in order to assimilate into white society. In Rakim's case, blackness supplants white assimilation as both goal and reward. Rakim's sense of his own blackness is bolstered in comparison to the narrator's perceived whiteness, his own racial identity more assured in comparison. In reversing the narrative of passing, and making blackness the desired aim, Smith reverses the racial power dynamic.

Rakim's introduction enables Smith to reimagine the stereotypical racial dynamics of mixed race and force the reader to interrogate ideas of cultural appropriation. Many of the contemporary debates about cultural appropriation are focused on a white/black binary and dynamic, yet through Rakim and the narrator of *Swing Time*, Smith is questioning how we define cultural appropriation when those boundaries are less clear, when the person appropriating black culture is mixed race. In recent years, white appropriation of black culture has garnered a lot of media attention, particularly in relation to white musicians such as Madonna, Iggy Azalea and Katy Perry. Smith's characterisation of Australian superstar Aimee in *Swing Time* has been read by many critics as a thinly veiled caricature of Madonna, a bored pop star who turns her attention to her 'African project', a 'zone… well, I'm loaded right now and I can't remember where it is right now, tiny country…in the west?' (p.141). Her interest in the project in Africa wanes, to be replaced by an obsession with local boy Lamin, which, in turn, is replaced by a covetous obsession with an African baby she meets by coincidence and secretly buys/'adopts'. Her obsession, and subsequent removal of the baby from Africa, sparks a debate within the novel about cultural appropriation, white saviour

complexes and the attitude of white supremacy that continues to allow wealthy white people to purchase black people.

In 2017, *Harper's Bazaar* published an essay by Smith, 'Getting In and Getting Out', which discusses the notion of cultural appropriation. The essay was written in response to Jordan Peele's race horror film *Get Out* and to the controversy surrounding the showing of white artist Dana Schutz's painting *Open Casket* in New York, a painting which depicts lynching victim Emmett Till's open casket. Smith argues that the root of cultural appropriation is desire, rather than hatred:

> Peele has found a concrete metaphor for the ultimate unspoken fear: that to be oppressed is not so much to be hated as obscenely loved. Disgust and passion are intertwined. Our antipathies are simultaneously a record of our desires, our sublimated wishes, our deepest envies.[31]

In the case of Aimee, it is the fetishisation of blackness that instigates her desire for Lamin and the African baby; it is her white privilege, and a history of white supremacy, that has entitled her belief in her right to own them. Admiring and appreciating blackness from a distance can be read as love, but it is the necessity of ownership that becomes appropriation and oppression – 'want it, see it, take it. No apologies. I don't apologise ever for what I want!'.[32] Aimee's interracial relationships then are a combination of desire and a need for possession. Similarly, the narrator's friendship with Tracey is destroyed by Tracey's allegation that she witnessed the narrator's father perform a sex act on a 'doll, human-sized, but inflated, and of very dark complexion – "like a golliwog", she wrote – with a crescent of

[31] Smith, *Feel Free: Essays*, p.216.
[32] Smith, *Swing Time*, p.140.

synthetic lamb's wool hair and a huge pair of bright red lips, red as blood' (p.350). Unable to maintain a relationship with her strong-minded mother, it is suggested that her father sublimates his desire for the black female form through an exaggerated, grotesque golliwog figure, reflecting an inherently fetishised desire of black flesh.

Whilst condemning the exploitative appropriation and fetishisation of blackness by white artists in the article, and through the presentation of Aimee in *Swing Time*, Smith also cautions the reader as to the end result of continuing to apportion access to certain cultural references based on a hierarchy of colour.

> If *I* was an artist, and if I could paint—could the subject matter be mine? I am biracial. I have Afro-hair, my skin is brown, I am identified, by others and by myself, as a black woman. And so, by the logic of the letter—if I understood it correctly—this question of subject matter, in my case, would not come up.[33]

Smith explores this idea further by questioning whether her children, whose father is white, would be qualified to address the subject matter of black pain. Though their 'green-eyed, yellow haired' appearance allocates them even more racial privilege then their light-skinned biracial mother, they are still direct descendants of colonial poverty and slavery (p.219). Ultimately, Smith argues that the continual policing of art in regard to cultural appropriation is a zero-sum game. Smith argues that the more barriers we place around who can authentically understand black culture, to the extent that they are 'allowed' to represent it, the fewer the number of artists/people who will pass the test, and the longer the colour hierarchy continues to persist.

[33] Smith, *Feel Free: Essays*, p.218.

Yet it is precisely this aspect of colourism that responders to the essay focussed on. Smith's essay received criticism from an online African-American audience that argued that Smith's light-skinned privilege has protected her from experiencing the full pain of the black experience in America and, as such, disqualifies her comments on the matter. The focus of this critique serves to reinforce the necessity of asking the questions Smith is raising. In response to Smith's essay, African-American blogger Candace McDuffie commented:

> Smith, who is a biracial black woman with very light skin, omits the historical complexities and benefits of colorism entirely. She associates her blackness not with experiences or cultural traditions, but with having "afro-hair" and brown skin.[34]

She further states that:

> As Smith asks these questions and makes these assumptions, it is clear that she is more interested in being an ethnographer to black culture than a black woman. Although she states that she is identified by herself and others as black, she centers [*sic*] whiteness in an essay that was supposed to focus on black pain (ibid).

Through this lens, McDuffie argues that Smith is guilty of the same cultural appropriation of black pain that Schutz is accused of. Danielle Jackson, another African-American blogger who wrote about the piece, expresses disappointment that Smith's tone seemed 'removed' from its subject. Rather than a lack of understanding and cultural connection critiqued in McDuffie's post, Jackson's issue with the article focusses on Smith's lack of care:

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[34] Candace McDuffie, 'Where Zadie Smith's "Getting In and Getting Out" Misses the Mark', *Ploughshares at Emerson College*, 27 June 2017 <http://blog.pshares.org/index.php/zadie-smiths-getting-in-and-out/> [accessed 21 March 2019].

> I wished she had engaged this subject matter with her heart. I needed her to think of the logic of Black's letter from a place of shared pain, shared experiences, and shared anger. I needed her to really listen to it, before dismantling it.[35]

It is interesting that, even though Smith identifies publicly as a black woman, often now a black American, and that she has been referred to as a black writer since her debut in 2000, Smith's analysis is invalidated by her light skin, which this blogger evidences as proof that she cannot understand black pain and has no meaningful connection to black culture. Both responses are from African-American bloggers, a section of Smith's audience who seem to have found her argument particularly problematic. Whilst there is an argument to be made about context here, in relation to Smith's right to discuss black, African-American pain specifically – the racial context and history of America is markedly different than that of the UK where Smith grew up – the most pertinent issue identified here is her skin tone and lack of care.

Smith's ability 'to be her critical, writerly self, and still engage with her blackness' is lauded earlier in Jackson's piece, in a discussion of 'Speaking in Tongues' and *On Beauty*, but her introspection about her subject position as a mixed-race woman within the cultural appropriation debate is read as emotional disinterest in blackness. Jackson argues that

> Cultural appropriation isn't met with disdain in the black community because we don't want to be touched or looked at; we want our traditions to be treated with

[35] Danielle Jackson, 'Smith Takes on Black Pain With a Light Touch', *Longreads*, 27 June 2017 <https://longreads.com/2017/06/27/zadie-smith-takes-on-black-pain-with-a-light-touch/> [accessed 21 March 2019].

> respect and placed in a lens where its originators are given proper acknowledgement and credit—not totalitarian ownership (ibid).

Both of these critiques prompt interesting questions in the debate about cultural appropriation and where the boundary lies between a loving, respectful exploration of black culture and an oppressive and exploitative one, which in this critique is rendered as a colour line. By this logic, how do we reconcile Smith's presentation of Rakim and the unnamed narrator in *Swing Time*? They both adopt a commodified and Americanised version of an Afrocentric black identity. In both examples, the black identity expressed is a commodified, inauthentic version amalgamated from a variety of sources, and yet both read as sincere attempts to discover and proudly display an affinity and identification with blackness. Smith pokes fun at the idea of an authentic black identity that needs protecting, mocking her character's attempts at cultural appropriation, and yet the sincerity of the tone, and the earnestness of her characters, reads as a loving representation of an integral part of the journey towards claiming a mixed-race subject position. Does Rakim's revelation as mixed race undermine this and suggest an exploitative motive? Or does the fact of the narrator's resolutely – and much more 'authentically' depicted - conscious black mother reinforce the narrator's claim to this identity? As a mixed-race teenager growing up during this time period in Britain, is Smith guilty of cultural appropriation or paying homage to a legitimate mixed-race rite of passage?

White appropriation of black culture is more definitively addressed through Aimee. Smith makes it easy to condemn the Madonna-esque figure who thinks nothing of satiating her desire by buying a baby. It is much more challenging to articulate where the boundaries lie when considering cultural appropriation from a mixed-race perspective. This debate showcases two important issues; firstly, that questions about racial authenticity remain as inherent to ideas about mixed-race identity in 2018 as they were two decades earlier when

Smith wrote *White Teeth*. Secondly, that whilst the mixed-race position may not fully have 'counter[ed] the narrow path with the wide open road' as Smith suggests the mixed-race figure has the potential to, it does draw attention to the places in the road which are most narrow and difficult to navigate.[36]

Following this period, the racial identity of the narrator of *Swing Time* seems to settle and become more secure. She no longer feels the need to perform a racial identity in the exaggerated way she performed blackness at university, rejecting the impetus to depend on the mythologies of blackness, or the scaffolding of imperial white history, to construct her own sense of racial identity. Irie's interaction with British history, via Shakespeare's Dark Lady sonnet, deepened her own feelings of isolation, her sense of self-worth and validation dependent on proof, and recognition, of her belonging in Britain. It seems apt that in *Swing Time* it is the same sonnet that symbolises the narrator's rejection of a reliance on European history to validate her racial or national identity:

> Why did he think it so important for me to know that Beethoven dedicated a sonata to a mulatto violinist, or that Shakespeare's dark lady really was dark, or that Queen Victoria had deigned to raise a child of Africa, 'bright as any white girl'? I did not want to rely on each European fact having its African shadow as if without the scaffolding of the European fact everything African might turn to dust in my hands.[37]

The narrator's anger at the idea of European history being used to validate the existence of black people in Britain is apparent as she takes a gallery tour with Aimee, narrated by a guide who tells the story of Dido Elizabeth Belle, and her 'magnanimous' uncle who took in a poor

[36] Smith, *Feel Free: Essays*, p.340.
[37] Smith, *Swing Time*, p.294.

black girl and catalysed the abolition of slavery. Angry at the favourable bent of this narrative, which suggested the 'girl's father and mother had 'met in the Caribbean'', the narrator tells Aimee the full horror of the Zong slave ship which had 'sailed so many times through my childhood nightmares' (p.112). Not only does the narrator refute the need to validate her existence through British history, but she rejects it as the fallacy it is, fully aware of the racial power dynamics and history of slavery that resulted in her mixed-race existence in the UK. This interlude also speaks back to Candace McDuffie's critique of Smith's essay 'Getting In and Getting Out'. McDuffie's argument that Smith's skin colour privilege precludes a cultural connection to black suffering by shielding her from the full weight of black pain is invalidated here as the narrator's connection with the suffering of her ancestors was embedded in her from childhood by her mother.

The narrator of *Swing Time* is a more assured version of Irie: whilst she struggles with finding her purpose, and feeling secure in her identity, this confusion is not rooted in her racial identity. She is aware of her raciality and internalises as problematic the aspects of her racial identity that remain 'other' in the landscape of Britain. Her struggle, however, is catalysed by feelings of inferiority in relation to her more talented friend and ambitious mother, not any deep-seated trauma over her racial identity. Smith suggests that this struggle against feelings of inadequacy and insecurity aren't specific to the experiences of mixed-race individuals, or necessarily rooted in a mixed-race identity, but a more universal journey towards finding one's self and place in the world.

> I think I was strange to my mother and to my father, a changeling belonging to neither of them, and although this is of course true of all children in the end […] my father's children would have come to this knowledge with a certain slowness, over years […]

> whereas I was born knowing it, I have always known it, it is a truth stamped all over my face (p.157).

Smith suggests that the work of reckoning with one's individual identity is a process of selfhood that occurs irrespective of racial identity. It is a challenge that presents itself much earlier for those of mixed race, however, as their difference, their perceived isolation from each of their parents, is inscribed in their very physiology, the hue of their skin and the texture of their hair. Maria Root argues that 'mixed-race poses no inherent types of stress that would result in psychological maladjustment […] any distress related to being mixed race is likely to be a response to an environment that has internalized racist beliefs'.[38] Root argues that we should shift our focus to 'the role society plays rather than focusing on the "other" status of the mixed race individual', an argument that finds its echo in *Swing Time* (ibid). Smith presents a mixed-race character whose own sense of racial identity is relatively unproblematic: any trauma or anxiety surrounding her racial identity is almost always externally imposed. The narrator's journey is much more about reconciling her sense of self, outside of her relationship with her mother, Aimee and Tracey – and differentiating herself from the various models of womanhood that they represent - than about reconciling her racial identity. It can be argued that the narrator's racial reconciliation occurs within the novel, or even that the need to reconcile a racial identity dissipates with time, and yet the novel ends without any certainty about the narrator's sense of self or clarity about her own needs or desires.

[38] Mahtani, p.37.

ZADIE SMITH, 2018

Smith's shifting articulation of mixedness is echoed in recent interviews and articles promoting the publication of *Swing Time* and *Feel Free*. As discussed in a previous chapter, Smith's racial background was used as a marketing tool for *White Teeth*, as well as an ideological publicity vehicle for the state project of multiculturalism at the start of the twenty-first century. Reviews and profiles of the novel devoted almost as much attention to Smith's racial background, and the 'insider' status it provided her with, as the novel itself. This focus on her racial background, and the insistence upon likening her to authors such as Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi, clearly made Smith uncomfortable:

> Smith has been compared with Salman Rushdie. She says it may be well intended, definitely a compliment, but racist nonsense none the less. She yawns. "I think I have brown people in my book, and so does Salman, and so does Hanif Kureishi. So it's a genre, don't you see that?"[39]

When asked about issues such as multiculturalism and race, Smith was described as 'spiky'[40] and 'thorn[y]', uncomfortable with the status of spokesperson placed upon her in the aftermath of *White Teeth* and reticent to be drawn on ideas about racial politics in Britain.[41]

In contrast, by the time *Swing Time* was released in late 2016, and *Feel Free* in early 2018, Smith's career was fully established, and her status cemented as a cultural commentator in both Britain and the US. After the middling success of her second novel, *The Autograph Man,* in 2002, Smith left the UK for a fellowship at Harvard that would be the

[39] Hattenstone, 'White knuckle ride'.
[40] Lyall, 'A Good Start'.
[41] George, 'Author Purposeful With Prose, Fidgety With Fame'.

start of her transatlantic life split between the US and the UK, and the inspiration for her third novel *On Beauty*. A transatlantic move to the US, specifically to New York, seems to be a popular move for young British writers after achieving early success in the UK - Smith's contemporary Hari Kunzru also made the move after his early success in 2002 – and it is interesting to consider the motivation behind this move when both authors had received such acclaim in the UK after their debuts. There is a suggestion that, for Smith, this move was perhaps motivated by a need to move away from the personal attention she received in the UK. When asked in an interview for US publication *The Atlantic,* following the publication of *On Beauty* in 2005, about why she no longer gave interviews in the UK, Smith replied:

> When writers are in their home country they're cagey, terrified—but when they're in, you know, Belgium, they'll tell you everything. They'll tell you about their mother's underwear. It's much more interesting. […] I guess the difference is that in America, there's not so much gossip and commentary about me. That all goes to Dave Eggers or somebody else. I get that stuff in England, and I hate it, but in America I feel completely free of it—or maybe I just don't know what part of the paper it's in. I feel like I'm just a writer in America, not some kind of freak.[42]

The move away from Britain, and the media preoccupation with her personal life and racial identity that was 'caging' her in, resulted in a palpable sense of freedom within her work. Whereas Smith was reluctant to be drawn on her racial identity at the start of her career, after the publication of *On Beauty* she began to refer to herself as a black woman, the significance and importance of which she writes about in *Changing My Mind*. Many of the essays in *Feel*

[42] Jessica Murphy Moo, 'Zadie, Take Three', *The Atlantic*, October 2005 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2005/10/zadie-take-three/304294/> [accessed 21 March 2019].

Free discuss her experience of growing up mixed race in Britain, or her affinity with an African-American identity, as discussed earlier in this chapter. It seems as though the move to America allowed her the space and freedom to explore her identity independently, outside of the limitations placed upon her by the British press. There is also the sense that the different racial contexts of the UK and the US allowed her the space in which to develop a stronger sense of a black identity. Britain continues to grapple with the idea of black Britishness, of non-white people being rooted in Britain rather than a new demographic, whereas African-American identity is embedded within American history and society. It is American author Zora Neale Hurston that elicited this recognition of black womanhood in Smith, suggesting that America not only provided her with the freedom to explore her racial identity, but also examples of black womanhood with which to identify.

Smith's adoption of the US as her new home has been reciprocated by the American press keen to claim her as one of their own. A review in the *LA Times,* following the publication of *Feel Free,* claims her as a 'New Yorker'[43] and a profile in *Elle* refers to her as an 'essential chronicler of American life.'[44]

> She's become an invaluable investigator of American culture. In particular, "a lot of my subjects are black artists," she says. "It's about inserting myself and feeling this commonality in the black artistic community in America." The day before we meet, she is awarded the 2017 Langston Hughes Medal from the City College of New York, whose illustrious past recipients include Maya Angelou and James Baldwin (ibid).

[43] Walton Muyumba, 'Zadie Smith's brilliance is on display in 'Feel Free'', *Los Angeles Times*, 7 February 2018 <http://www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-ca-jc-zadie-smith-20180207-story.html> [accessed 21 March 2019].
[44] Keziah Weir, 'With Feel Free, Zadie Smith Solidifies Her Status as an Essential Chronicler of American Life', *Elle*, 9 February 2018 <https://www.elle.com/culture/books/a15895357/zadie-smith-feel-free-interview/> [accessed 21 March 2019].

Smith is anointed with the same status as seminal black authors such as Angelou and Baldwin and expresses her own affinity with the black African American community and artist tradition. It is interesting to view the American reaction to Smith in comparison to the response from the British media for whom Smith has become an invaluable emblem and representative of Britishness. Joanna Briggs' profile of *Swing Time* refers to Smith as the 'most famous living British novelist' and describes her thought process as 'a very English kind of equivocation.'[45] White British journalist Philip Hensher refers to the ways in which Smith is 'like [him]', in stark contrast to the early years of Smith's career when her appeal was based on the extent to which she was different to people like him.[46] As Smith has been embraced by the American media, the desire to claim her as unequivocally British has increased and the attention paid to her racial identity decreased accordingly. The additional weight of American esteem and approval has validated Smith's position which, coupled with the fact of Smith's numerous awards and twenty year career, has proved her worth and earned her a place at the metaphorical British table.

Smith's latest essay collection, *Feel Free,* was unanimously well-received. The book is a collection of her essays and reviews written and published during the years of the Obama presidency. Reviewers share an admiration of the breadth of Smith's interest and expertise, from art reviews to ruminations on Justin Bieber, yet there is a palpable desire for Smith to focus her attention on contemporary political and social matters, for her to speak to the condition of England and the US. Reviewers refer to Smith as a 'one of the great writers and

[45] Joanna Briggs, 'Whomph!', *London Review of Books*, 1 December 2016 <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n23/joanna-biggs/whomph> [accessed 21 March 2016].
[46] Philip Hensher, 'NW by Zadie Smith: review', *The Telegraph*, 3 September 2012 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/9508844/NW-by-Zadie-Smith-review.html> [accessed 21 March 2019].

thinkers of her generation',[47] a 'cultural authority' and an 'authority on social concerns'.[48] In the aftermath of the Brexit vote and Trump's election, there is a tangible desire for Smith's take on current political events.[49] There is a sense that, not only are the media and society looking to Smith to make sense of the contemporary moment, in both Britain and America, but that her analysis has weight. Post-Brexit and Post-Trump, people are looking for ways to make sense of the abrupt change in the cultural climate and the sense that Smith is crucial to this endeavour is common. In 2000, Smith was seized upon as the definitive voice of multicultural Britain, but her expertise was specifically limited within this area: in 2018 Smith's authority is much more universal and global in scope.

It is interesting that in a post-Brexit Britain, where otherness is more potent and prevalent than ever, Smith is discussed in ever more familiar terms. She is claimed as a British novelist, without the hyphenation of black-British writer that so often has been, and continues to be, a compulsory epithet for non-white authors in Britain. Since the publication of *Swing Time* and *Feel Free* her own mixed race, black heritage is referred to much less frequently, even though the frequency with which she writes about race and blackness, and refers to herself as a black woman, has increased. This prompts questions about whether the decreasing frequency with which Smith's mixed race is mentioned, and the increasing readiness to claim her as British without hyphen, suggests that mixed race has become normalised, less 'other', in the British consciousness. I would argue, however, that the recent

[47] Renee Graham, 'Before the deluge', *Boston Globe*, 9 February 2018 <https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2018/02/08/beforedeluge/Np606vVEQ8tFhmzXHuZjFI/story.html> [accessed 21 March 2019].
[48] Harry Wallop, 'BBC criticised for bias over Zadie Smith's R4 broadcast', *The Telegraph*, 30 March 2011 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/8416166/BBC-criticised-for-bias-over-Zadie-Smiths-R4-broadcast.html> [accessed 21 March 2019].
[49] Tim Adams, 'Feel Free: Essays by Zadie Smith review – anyone for a cultural thought experiment', *The Guardian*, 6 February 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/feb/06/feel-free-zadie-smith-review-essays> [accessed 21 March 2019].

media coverage of Smith continues to echo back to Perfect's articulation of 'knowable [minority] communities'.[50] Having already been validated by British institutions like Cambridge, and after achieving international success and acclaim, Smith is the epitome of the 'knowable' immigrant, the model minority.

In the intervening years following *White Teeth*'s publication, Britain's sense of the 'other' has continued to shift, both in terms of the locus of the fear and the tone of the rhetoric. The early 2000s were marked by a flawed, yet arguably optimistic, approach to cultural difference and race, a political context that presented Smith as other, yet ostensibly encouraged the British public to celebrate her otherness. In a post 9/11 and 7/7 landscape, Britain's sense of the other has changed and, increasingly, racial and cultural differences are seen as threats to the safety of the nation. Following the terrorist incidents in New York and London, Muslims became the new other, followed by Eastern European immigrants in the mid-noughties and most recently Syrian refugees. The Syrian crisis in particular has seen a return to the rhetoric of Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech, with politicians and press alike referring to Syrian refugees as 'swarms'.[51] In this political climate I would argue that Smith has come to epitomise what could be termed a 'model multiracial': not only is she exceptional in the sense of Joseph's definition of the exceptional multiracial, a figure that is 'unifying' and 'post-racial', but she is put forth as model minority.[52] Smith has proved herself through her elite education and acclaimed career and, as such, her particular variation of otherness is rendered palatable in an increasingly right-wing political environment. Smith's mixed race, her light skin, European features and attractive appearance, help provide a veneer

[50] Perfect, *Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism*, p.141.
[51] David Shariatmadari, 'Swarms, floods and marauders: the toxic metaphors of the migration debate', *The Guardian*, 10 August 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/10/migration-debate-metaphors-swarms-floods-marauders-migrants> [accessed 21 March 2019].
[52] Joseph, p.4.

of inclusivity that is less alien and threatening in its proximity to a version of recognisable white Britishness.

This use of the mixed-race figure as a safe conduit to present an image of progressive racial attitudes can also be seen across other forms of media as increasingly large numbers of retailers and advertisers used mixed-race families to sell their brands across the 2017/2018 Christmas period. Large, indelibly British, corporations such as John Lewis, Marks and Spencers, Morrisons and Debenhams all used mixed-race children and interracial families – specifically black and white mixed-race families and children - in their Christmas campaigns in the past two years. In addition, the advert for the government mandated TV licencing agency also featured an interracial family with mixed-race children. Michele Elam argues that the 'next-generation marketing of mixed race yields dividends for its corporate sponsors even as racial discrimination in both blunt and subtle varieties persists unaffected.'[53] There are discernible periods in British contemporary history where the mixed-race figure has been imbued with additional prominence and meaning, to present an image of racial harmony in times when attitudes to race and difference are regressing, as they are in Britain in 2018. It is in these contexts that mixed-race figures bear the burden of symbolising racial harmony and figures such as Zadie Smith are held up as a model minority, as recognisable and saleable representatives of non-white Britishness. The use of mixed-race families in the adverts of flagship British brands such as Marks and Spencers and John Lewis act as an informal validation of mixed race as a mode of Britishness yet continue to perpetuate an exploitative idea of mixed race that prioritises saleability over actual social change.

Smith's appearance and beauty has always been, and remains, central to her appeal; not only has Smith been embraced by the literary world, but also the wider world of media and fashion. She is routinely pictured at parties in magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar* and

[53] Elam, p.18.

Vogue. When *Swing Time* was published, she was profiled in spreads in the *New York Times Style* magazine and *The Gentlewoman* that were more akin to fashion shoots than literary profiles. Her turban, the one that had racialised undertones when *White Teeth* was published, is now considered a 'signature' accessory by *Elle* magazine.

> When we meet, Smith—a veritable style icon—is wearing a long gray Acne coat and a gray turtleneck. Her hair is swathed in a signature turban (red, like her lipstick); she drops a pair of sunglasses on the table (red, too).[54]

There is a sense that Smith has not only surpassed the boundaries of the literary realm but, to a certain extent, has surpassed the very confines of race that were thrust upon her in 2000. Where profiles in 2000 referred to her continuously as mixed race or black British, now Smith is merely British or English without hyphen and her turban is no longer an ethnic marker but a style choice. Minelle Mahtani argues that 'not all mixed people can occupy the category of multiraciality because there are particular phenotypes associated with identifying as mixed race', and I would argue that Smith's particular brand of mixed race - her gender, lightness, European features and beauty – have specifically contributed to the success of her media profile.[55] There is a specifically gendered, and fetishised, aspect to the representation of mixed race within the media that Smith's profile exemplifies. Naomi Zack states that 'representations of multiculturalism are inexorably intertwined with womanhood'.[56] Speaking back to this notion Mahtani argues further that:

[54] Keziah Weir, 'With Feel Free, Zadie Smith Solidifies Her Status as an Essential Chronicler of American Life'.
[55] Quoted in Mahtani, p.42.
[56] Mahtani, p.64.

> Women of mixed race may experience less direct opposition or difficulty in countering social barriers than do men of mixed-race because "non-white men have more social, economic and political power than most women [and are thus] particularly threatening to [society]" (p.65).

This ties into the notion of the mixed-race figure as a 'safe' other, rendered even more palatable by the added dimension of gender, and may account for the fact that most of the prominent mixed-race figures in contemporary British culture are women. Not only is the mixed-race figure less threatening than a black one in a racial sense, but also in relation to gender, as women continue to hold less social power than men.

I argue further, however, that the focus on Smith's appearance has a deeper effect. As the reviews of *Feel Free* show, Smith's thoughts and opinions hold social weight, one that could potentially turn into political power should she decide to turn her attention in that direction: 'it's a manifesto that makes you wonder, just from time to time, how her nonfiction would sound if she put her supple gifts of description and analysis to work more often in places other than galleries and libraries'.[57] The persistent emphasis on Smith's appearance works to mediate this social power by re-gendering her. The publication of *Swing Time* coincided with a Kerry James Marshall retrospective and the release of Lady Gaga's latest album. To mark the occasion *The New York Times Style Magazine* profiled Smith as one of 'seven people whose gifts to culture we feel are exceptional'.[58] As befitting a style magazine, in her profile Smith appears against a bright pink background in high fashion outfits. Whilst all of the profiles are highly stylised and beautifully shot, Lady Gaga is shot with instruments

[57] Adams, 'Feel Free: Essays by Zadie Smith review – anyone for a cultural thought experiment'.
[58] Jeffrey Eugenides, 'The Pieces of Zadie Smith', *The New York Times Style Magazine*, 17 October 2016 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/10/17/t-magazine/the-greats.html> [accessed 21 March 2019].

and a typewriter, Kerry James Marshall in his studio and Massimo Bottura in his restaurant. All four are artists in their own right and yet only three were photographed in a working space, with Smith's shoot more closely resembling a fashion shoot than the profile of a seminal author. Profiles like this mediate Smith's social power through her gender, highlighting her femininity and beauty rather than her artistry, a factor Smith is aware of, yet seemingly complicit in:

> She tells me about the time she went to do a photo shoot for a magazine and found herself lost in a sprawl of make-up artists, dressers and little Prada dresses that could never have fitted her. "I wouldn't mind it if I saw five-hour photo shoots for Martin Amis, but that doesn't happen. If you're a woman it's as if they want to reduce everything to the same denominator." Which is? "That you must present yourself as an attractive woman even if you're a rocket scientist. Its total arse isn't it?"[59]

The gendered presentation of Smith, and of the mixed-race figure more generally, works on numerous levels. The preoccupation with Smith's beauty coheres with lingering notions of the exoticised and fetishised mixed-race woman that proliferated during Britain's colonial period and endures within the contemporary fascination with the mixed-race body. Across the last decade beauty standards have started to morph; whilst thin, white women remain the benchmark against which beauty is measured, the popularity of racially ambiguous celebrities like the Kardashians – infamous for their curvaceous bodies and tanned skin - have changed the ways in which beauty is conceptualised. The Kardashians' ability to monetise their appearance has helped to increase the market value and saleability of racial ambiguity and mixedness within the media. In a review of *White Teeth* in 2000, journalist Melissa Denes

[59] Hattenstone, 'White knuckle ride'.

commented on the emphasis Hamish Hamilton were placing on Smith's racial background. She claimed that 'it would not matter if she were a he, white and the wrong side of 40: Smith can write'.[60] Whilst in 2018 it seems that Smith has achieved this status of neutrality, where the strength of her writing is the defining feature of her media profile, the continued emphasis on her appearance and gender suggest this is not yet the case and that her racial identity and appearance continue to matter.

[60] Moss, 'White Teeth by Zadie Smith'.

CONCLUSION

At the Southbank Centre in London in July 2017, an audience member questioned Zadie Smith about why she continues to write about mixed race. In response, Smith specified that she was 'not interested in answers or figuring out identity or what it means to be mixed race', but 'the thought models, processes and questions involved' in conceptualising and considering mixedness.[1] This shift in focus from identity formation towards an investigation of the processes and 'thought models' behind contemporary representations of mixed race has underpinned this thesis. In identifying 2000 as the starting point of a contemporary reawakening of interest in mixed race, and the various socio-political messages mixedness has been tasked with communicating, this thesis has tracked shifts in discourses of mixed race across the last two decades. Using authors as case studies, this thesis has exposed and explored these thought models as they manifest through the representation and discussion around authors of mixed race, as well as the ways in which the work of these authors exposes these processes, questions mainstream ideas about race and mixedness, and make new models of both available.

By taking this approach, this thesis has been able to identify key moments and trends in relation to what Caballero and Aspinall term 'external' conceptualisations of mixed race – outsider driven narratives of mixedness constructed largely by white journalists through media profiles, author interviews and book reviews – in Britain across the last two decades, as well as shifts in 'insider-led' conceptualisations of mixedness from the authors themselves.[2] From 2000 until 2005 there was a clear trend in publishing, and a public appetite for, fiction about the sense of mixed-race multiculturalism this thesis identifies. Zadie

[1] Zadie Smith, 'Zadie Smith: Swing Time – in conversation', *Southbank Centre*, 6 July 2017.
[2] Caballero and Aspinall, p.479.

Smith's seminal success established mixed-race fiction – in the sense of mixed-race characters, as well as authors – as an important site of social commentary and a saleable commodity. *White Teeth*, *The Impressionist* – and *Brick Lane* to a certain extent – entered into a socio-political climate liberally offering mixedness as proof of a successful multiculturalism, and a social context displaying an increased interest in mixed race as an identity category and growing demographic. As shown in chapter three, publishers were keen to capitalise on the Zadie Smith-era marketplace, and whilst Ali's novel does not explicitly discuss mixedness, her racial identity was a focal point of interest in relation to the novel and the publisher's interest in acquiring it. It was at this point, after 9/11 and in the wake of the early noughties boom in 'Asian Cool' as Kundnani terms it, that interest in British Asian authors peaked, the most notable of whom – Kunzru and Ali – were also mixed race.[3] By the time Diana Evans' *26a* was published in 2005, in an increasingly tense period of race relations following the July 7th tube and bus bombings, and an increasingly negative critique of New Labour's policy of multiculturalism, the market was not as receptive to Evans or her novel. As such, whilst *26a* was critically acclaimed, its mainstream success was much more muted. The contrast between Smith's overwhelming success in 2000, and Evans' quieter reception in 2005, reflects the shift in attitudes towards race, multiculturalism and mixedness across this period.

In the intervening years, as discussed in the introduction, interest in mixed race waned until around 2011, when the census revealed the mixed-race population as the fastest growing demographic in Britain. This re-invoked interest in mixed race in the media, coalescing around mixed-race celebrities such as Jessica Ennis-Hill and Lewis Hamilton. Meghan Markle's introduction as Prince Harry's then girlfriend – now wife – in 2016 was the focus point of a renewed interest in mixed race in public and media discourse. The media coverage

[3] Kundnani, p.52.

of their engagement exposed persistent, and often damaging, conceptualisations of mixedness. It is into this social context of mixed race that Smith's 2016 novel *Swing Time*, Kunzru's 2017 novel *White Tears* and Evans' 2018 novel *Ordinary People* were published, intervening once again in the ways in which hybridity and mixedness were conceptualised and represented. Studying the authors' profiles across the last two decades has illuminated the shifts in public discourses of mixed race; whilst mixed-race authors are still associated with ideas of coolness and a hip, metropolitan population, there is a notable decline in the overt racialisation of the authors and their work. In 2018, Smith is most often noted by her Britishness – importantly a Britishness without hyphen – and a sense of global cosmopolitanism, and Kunzru's profile continues to reflect a transatlantic sense of urban cool and edginess, not limited to parameters of Asian or British culture. Evans, the most overtly racialised mixed-race author in 2005, in is offered as a representative of 'an urban milieu that is middle-class and non-white' in 2018, positioned as ordinary and familiar in the contemporary moment in contrast to her status as an extraordinary, multicultural spokeswoman a decade earlier.[4]

Whilst it would be naively optimistic to interpret this shift as representative of a post-racial Britain, or a social context in which mixedness has been rendered ordinary – particularly in the aftermath of the Brexit vote and the rise of the far right in Britain – it does reflect an increasingly global and cosmopolitan sense of mixedness, in which one can be British, middle class and mixed. In contrast to the previous decades, when mixedness was predominantly envisioned as a space of identity confusion and displacement, the contemporary representation of mixedness made available through recent profiles of these authors suggests a sense of mixedness that is assured, British and international, black and yet decreasingly racialised as so: a notable shift in the discourses surrounding mixed-race authors

[4] Arifa Akbar, 'Ordinary People by Diana Evans review – magnificence and marital angst'.

between the start of the century and the present moment. Combined with the growing activism around diversifying the publishing industry[5], and the emergent trend for literature that examines race relations and racial history in Britain,[6] there is space for a cautious optimism that this process will continue to make room for increasingly diverse representations of mixedness, and race and class more generally, within the publishing industry and the literary marketplace.[7]

If we can justify a cautious sense of optimism based on the continued success, and increased freedom, of Smith, Kunzru and Evans, how does Ali feature in this shift? Arguably the most contentious of the authors considered within this study, Ali's presence within the literary marketplace has faded, despite the fact that she wrote three further novels after *Brick Lane*. Unlike Smith, Kunzru and Evans, who have successfully retained a sense of cultural relevance and resonance, Ali has been largely absent from the British literary scene since 2011. Unlike Smith, Kunzru and Evans, however, for whom race remains a central aspect of their texts, Ali's decline in popularity can be mapped alongside the increasing distance she placed between herself, her work and race as a subject. Whilst the other chapters within this thesis have considered the authors' debut novels alongside their most recent work, Ali's chapter focuses solely on *Brick Lane*, as her most recent novel, *Untold Story* (2011), had little relevance to the ideas considered within this thesis. Ali's case study, in this sense, further

[5] A good example of this is the 'We need diverse books' campaign that aims to diversify representation within children's literature <https://diversebooks.org/>.
[6] Books such as Reni Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race* (2017), Afua Hirsch's *Brit(ish): On Race, Identity and Belonging* (2018) and Akala's *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire* (2018) have all been *Sunday Times* bestsellers.
[7] This is further bolstered by publishing diversity initiatives such as Penguin's 'WriteNow' campaign which aims to 'mentor new writers from communities under represented on the nation's bookshelves' <https://www.penguin.co.uk/company/creative-responsibility/writenow/writenow.html> [accessed 24 March 2019] or Nikesh Shukla's 'new social enterprise literary agency', *The Good Literary Agency* <https://www.thegoodliteraryagency.org/> [accessed 24 March 2019].

cautions against any premature optimism about progressive shifts in attitudes towards race, or increased diversity within the publishing industry, seeming to confirm that, although her peers are decreasingly racialised within the media, race is still central to the commercial appeal of non-white authors within the literary marketplace.

Whilst Smith and her peers have created an important space for new conceptualisations of mixed race, and for authors of mixed race, it must be noted that, although seemingly signifying a diversification of the literary marketplace, in reality the prominence of these authors constructed a very narrow and prescriptive model of the mixed race, multicultural author that was still embroiled in networks of class and privilege. Sarah Ilott argues that books such as *White Teeth*, and authors such as Zadie Smith, exemplify Huggan's notion of 'strategic exoticism', books that are ostensibly 'about minority cultures' for a 'projected audience [that] is largely white, middle-class and mainstream'.[8] She argues that the

> focus on a certain kind of author […] those that are cosmopolitan, mobile, award-winning celebrities, who speak of global and local politics with the authority attendant upon those that have both attended some of the world's best universities and accrued international stardom (p.102).

Whilst ostensibly indicative of increased diversity, in actuality, these authors function as a further entrenchment of the established class-based hierarchy. What the success of authors such as Smith and Kunzru show is that success within the mainstream publishing industry – and the public domain – is still largely dependent upon an elite education and the connections, and class privilege, attached to that.

[8] Ilott, p.95.

Representations of British mixedness – through the cultural figure of the mixed-race celebrity or literary fiction - continue to be London-centric, predominantly heterosexual, black and female. There have been very few notable debut authors of mixed race, or fiction with mixed-race protagonists, since 2005.[9] It is clear that although the authors considered within this study mark an important contemporary moment in mixed-race literature, their success reflects only a minimal shift within the publishing industry's diversity strategies. Other than their mixed-race backgrounds – which, as Dagbovie-Mullins argues, has the potential to function as a 'more palatable form of blackness' – their profiles resemble the over-representation of Oxbridge, middle-class authors within the literary marketplace.[10] In the context of the early years of New Labour's multiculturalism, or the boom in interest in mixed race during the early years of the 2010s, mixedness itself functioned as a form of exoticised privilege. Representations of mixedness, and authors, outside of these parameters – diversity of gender, sexuality, class positions and literary form, as well as region – need to be commissioned, promoted and discussed in order to continue to push towards alternative, 'future-thinking narrative arcs'[11] of mixed race, and the ways in which we think about, and talk about, race more widely.[12]

This thesis has worked to explore the ways in which mixed race was utilised as both a marketing tool within the literary marketplace, and a social tool as required by the socio-

[9] The most pertinent example is Kit de Waal, a mixed race, Birmingham based author with working class roots, whose debut novel *My Name is Leon* was published in 2016. Whilst de Waal's profile reflects a more diverse author profile – in location as well as class background – her novel is set in 1980s and echoes ideas about mixedness of the time period, casting the mixed-race figure as a traumatic, displaced one. *My Name is Leon* is told from the perspective of a young mixed-race boy in foster care, whose black father is imprisoned and whose white brother is quickly adopted after his mother has a nervous breakdown.
[10] Dagbovie-Mullins, *Crossing B(l)ack*, p.11.
[11] Upstone, *Rethinking Race*, p.13.
[12] This work is being explored in in the UK in essays featured in collections such as *The Good Immigrant* (2016) and *Safe: On Black, British Men Reclaiming Space* (2019), and in the publications (online and in printed zines) of intersectional feminist collective gal-dem, but as yet is not reflected in mainstream literary fiction.

political discourse at the time. The authors considered within this study have therefore come to embody the different phases of mixed-race thought models across the past two decades – the multicultural mixed-race figure, the exceptional multiracial, the marginal mixed-race individual and the harbinger of a post racial society. This thesis has also examined the ways in which these conceptualisations of mixedness are identified, as well as challenged and re-negotiated, through the work of Smith et.al, highlighting the new models of thought that they make available.

Irie's multi-hyphenated child, often read as a harbinger of a post-racial millennium, seemingly reflects John McLeod's interpretation of 'the figure of the mixed-race child' in contemporary black writing of Britain, 'deployed to embody the convergence of conjoined histories in a national context, one which takes down the distinction between national and international, singular and plural, here and there'.[13] The fallacy of this conceptualisation, however, is highlighted in the 2018 adaptation of the stage play, in which the representation of Irie's adult daughter, and the tone of convivial multiculturalism the play adopts, reflects the extent to which Britain is still embroiled in the legacies, and present reality, of race. *White Teeth,* however, with its incisive commentary on state sanctioned multiculturalism and its overlay of the history of its racially diverse, yet indomitably British cast, 'mobilises the concept rather than the consciousness of mixed-race lives as a way of exposing the rhizomic transracial histories and relations that challenge a notion of the nation as discretely multicultural' (ibid).

In contrast, 2016's *Swing Time* and 2018's *Feel Free*, present a much more assured and global sense of mixedness. Whilst the unnamed narrator of *Swing Time* struggles with her identity throughout the novel, this is not specifically linked to mixed race in the same way as Irie's. The development of the narrator is comic, reminiscent of typical adolescent-era

[13] McLeod, 'Extra dimensions, new routines', p.50.

identity experiments, rather than a traumatic search for a racial identity. The narrator's attempt to define a space for herself as a black, mixed-race woman is only a part of a larger search to find a place for herself at work, within her family and friendships, as well as the wider world. Whilst none of these struggles are unproblematic, or unrelated to her racial identity, it is not the driving force behind the narrator's feelings of displacement. Crucially, Smith's later works point to a sense of mixed race as a 'polycultural site of sameness and resemblance', a space that functions not as a group identity but a space of recognition for an international – if albeit Western – mixed-race population, and a metaphor for the wider ways in which all races, cultures and histories are mixed (p.49). 2018's *Feel Free* is Smith's most explicit discussion of her own relationship to her mixed-race identity; in sharp contrast to her reticence to discuss race and mixedness in 2000, as *White Teeth* was published, *Feel Free*'s discussion of both reflects a self-assuredness and confidence that is often absent in representation of mixedness. Whilst neither Smith's fiction, nor her essays, deny that the experience of mixedness can be complicated and confusing, they do not present this state as a terminal diagnosis, rather a transitional process of becoming.

In Kunzru's debut novel, the mixed-race figure functions as an explicit intervention into British racial and colonial history. Kunzru's novel historicises attitudes to mixedness, from the racial biologism of the nineteenth century, to the stereotypes of the sexual degeneracy of indigenous populations and the consequences of their miscegenation. Pran Nath's ability to pass as white British, as well as his myriad experiences of exploitation at the hands of British colonialists, calls into question notions of racial authenticity and national identity. It is in this sense that the mixed-race figure in Kunzru's work is disruptive, exposing colonial histories and injustices and de-stabilising the narrative of a great, benevolent Empire. Kunzru's interrogation of the notion of racial and cultural authenticity is a central concern of his most recent novel *White Tears,* which shifts the focus of, and responsibility for, racial and

cultural authenticity from non-white people burdened with the weight of representation, to the white people cannibalistically appropriating other cultures. Whereas *The Impressionist* details Pran Nath's tragic attempts to assimilate whiteness, *White Tears* eviscerates the young, hip, white American population that consumes black culture without care or context, enacting a form of fictional retribution as the lead protagonists, and main offenders, suffer their own tragic end. Kunzru's fiction utilises hybridity, in the sense of mixedness as well as cultural hybridity, as a position which disrupts established narratives, questions ideas of authenticity and reconfigures racialised dynamics of power.

Monica Ali is the outlier of this study insofar as *Brick Lane* is the only text considered that does not prominently reflect upon issues of mixed race and she is the only author who is no longer active within the literary marketplace. *Brick Lane*, however, provided fertile ground for thinking about the ways in which mixed race identity was marketed and became a contested space. From 2002, when early hype about the novel was starting to emerge, until 2007, when the novel was re-issued to coincide with the film adaptation, *Brick Lane* was a key space of exchange for conceptualisations of mixed race and the ways in which it was invoked in numerous discourses of authenticity. High profile community members, journalists, white Australian intellectuals, British Asian authors and publishers positioned Ali variously within these discourses of mixed-race authenticity, starkly highlighting the ways in which discourses of mixed race are constructed and exposing the numerous agents involved in the process.

Diana Evans' consistent presentation of mixedness as ordinary and everyday is perhaps the most radical of all these fictional interventions. Though Smith and Kunzru's work exposes the fallacies of modern myths of Empire and multiculturalism, their mixed-race protagonists often feel disconnected from their environments and anxious about their racial identities. In contrast, both in *26a* and *Ordinary People*, Evans' mixed-race protagonists

experience little anxiety or trauma in relation to their mixedness. The twins in *26a* embrace both British and Nigerian culture with curiosity, rather than confusion, and their lives in culturally diverse north-west London are ordinary, in opposition to the extraordinary multiculture of Smith's north-west London in *White Teeth*. Evans' consistent refusal in *Ordinary People* to succumb to the vocabulary of race that assigns people social assignations as white or black, exemplifies Upstone's sense of the 'possible future of a transformed social landscape' in which blackness and mixedness is ordinary and society has moved away from the need to contain a diverse population within binary categories of race.[14] *Ordinary People* answers Caballero and Aspinall's call for narratives of mixedness 'through which everyday experience is being reordered and new meanings emerge'.[15] Evans' novel combines 'realism with [optimism]', presenting a contemporary British social landscape in which racial thinking maintains its power and legacy, whilst offering a possible future in which this hold has been loosened.[16] Her novel radically refashions blackness and mixedness within a framework of the ordinary and everyday that have typically been the privilege of white fictional narratives and the remit of white authors.

New, and more, narratives and investigations into mixed race in Britain are necessary. More diverse narratives of mixedness are required in the media and in the authors represented through the publishing industry, to present a wider variety and perspective of mixed-race narratives to the literary marketplace. The diversity of mixed-race individuals, as well as the size of the mixed population, continues to grow in Britain, yet our social conceptions of mixedness have yet to reflect this increasingly large and nuanced population, a critical space for further academic intervention. Fiction is uniquely placed to intervene in these social discourses and, as this thesis has illustrated, is an integral site for challenging the dominant

[14] Upstone, *Rethinking Race*, p.11.
[15] Caballero and Aspinall, p.7.
[16] Upstone, *Rethinking Race*, p.13.

social perception of mixedness and re-conceptualising established thought-models of race. There is an urgent need to continue investigating and providing new narratives of mixed race, both within the publishing industry and academia. This thesis marks a crucial step towards both: contributing to the establishment of an interdisciplinary field of mixed-race studies in Britain, as well as the first sustained examination of mixed race within contemporary British fiction.

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